

THE ARDUOUS BEGINNING

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FOREWORD

My book, *The Western War Theatre*, appeared in 1959. It was my first endeavour to describe the events of the late war. It was also one of the first Soviet war memoirs. By and large, it was well received by the Soviet public, although many critical observations reached me.

Despite the favourable reception, I felt soon after the book came off the press that I could have done better. What I had wanted, and had not quite achieved, was to describe and analyse the most critical, initial period of the war. So I decided to make a thorough revision of the book. The criticism, the advice and counsel, the recollections and notes sent in by readers, helped me tremendously. My added writing experience, too, served me in good stead, for by then I had completed a fairly big book about the Stalingrad Battle.

My search for new material consumed all of two years. I have reviewed and reconsidered many of the passages. Layer upon layer, new facts accumulated. The end result, I felt, constituted essentially an entirely new book.

Now, the book opens with a chapter on what came before the war. It deals at length with the setbacks suffered by the Red Army in the early months of the war. The new book also contains more background material, showing the connection between seemingly disconnected events.

The Battle of Smolensk, for one, has not been examined anywhere deeply enough by Soviet war historians so far. I have tried to fill this gap. In any case, the description of the warfare in and around Smolensk is based on fact and contains details that illustrate the ebb and flow of the

fighting in the Smolensk area. The same is true to an even greater degree of the heroic defence of Mogilev.

The search for fresh detail was hard but gratifying. I have expanded the section on the organisational and educational work of the Communist Party among the troops and about the bonds that stretched from the rest of the country to the battle lines. I have done my best, too, to rectify some of the inaccuracies of the original manuscript.

This book is a military history by a war veteran and eyewitness who availed himself of considerable documentary material, of what Soviet and foreign authors have written before him and of unpublished recollections by veterans and eyewitnesses like himself. The memoirs part is no more than the bone for the meat of history.

I am deeply grateful to Lt.-Col. Vitold Pechorkin for the inestimable assistance he has rendered me in the writing of this book.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROLOGUE

The Kiev and Kharkov Military districts held large-scale exercises in mid-September 1935, when I was in my last year at the Frunze Military Academy. Like most other trainees I was very eager to attend the manoeuvres, for new strategic and operational ideas were to be tested in them. I was one of the lucky few whose wish came true. I was appointed umpire and sent to the 14th Cavalry Division, in which I had served without a break since 1919, barring intervals for training. However, when I arrived at Novograd-Volynsk, where the division was stationed, I was informed that for various reasons it would not take part in the war games and that most of its commanders had also been attached as umpires to other units. I was shunted to the near-by 5th Cavalry Division, which was on the "red" side.

The manoeuvres were notable in many respects. The Soviet officers who had taken part in them, or studied them from accounts and documents, thought back gratefully to their organisers during the war. They had been the crucible in which years of painstaking effort and investigation related to the technical reconstruction of the Soviet Armed Forces were put to a practical test. The strategic and operational principles on which the manoeuvres were based had been developed by such distinguished Soviet military theorists as Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Alexander Yegorov, Iona Yakir, Vladimir Triandafillov, and others.

These principles had crystallised when the Provisional Instructions on the Organisation of Battle in Depth were

compiled under the supervision of Alexander Yegorov, Chief of the General Staff; they were issued to the troops in 1933.

The planning of the manoeuvres had also begun well ahead of time, in April 1935. On May 17, 1935, Yegorov submitted his plan for the war games to Kliment Voroshilov, then People's Commissar for Defence.

The manoeuvres pursued a manifold purpose—to test the co-operation of mechanised and cavalry corps in actions against large mobile infantry-supported forces; to verify the possibilities of cavalry-supported mechanised corps and brigades in flanking operations and in the depth of enemy defences; to attempt air drops (involving three to four thousand paratroopers) and operations against the enemy rear and approaching enemy reserves by air-borne invasion forces; to organise massive air assaults on large mobile units and major enemy centres from field strips and a limited number of airfields; to test the operative system of troop air defences and the anti-aircraft defences of a large city (Kiev) situated in the operational zone, and, last but not least, to explore the possibilities of mobile forces breaking out of an enemy pocket.

The manoeuvres took place in and around Berdichev, Skviri and Kiev.

The strength of the "red" and "blue" sides was almost equal. All in all, the manoeuvres involved 75,000 men and officers, 25,000 horses, 800 tanks and 500 planes.

I am amazed to this day at the foresight of the generals who defined the purpose of the war games. If we had followed their principles more closely, matters in the early stage of the war would have taken an entirely different course.

After the plan for the manoeuvres was approved, the General Staff collaborated with the staffs of the Kiev and Kharkov Military districts in extensive reconnaissance and the finalisation of operations. On June 29, 1935, Yegorov submitted the plan to the Defence Commissar for endorsement. The final blueprint stressed that the principal purpose of the manoeuvres was to hammer out the order of battle for mechanised and cavalry units in close co-operation with the air force in a break through (and in exploiting the breach).

General leadership was vested in Iona Yakir, Commander of the Kiev Military District, the "blues" were headed by Ivan Dubovoi, Commander of the Kharkov Military District, and the "reds" by Semyon Turovsky.

The manoeuvres were held in two stages. In the first stage, the "blue" 5th Army was to breach the front near Zhitomir and push towards Kiev. To exploit the breakthrough, it was to send a mobile group of three cavalry divisions, a tank brigade and three mechanised regiments into the gap. Assaulted by the "blues", and recognising their intention, the "reds" quickly concentrated a strong force of mobile troops on the left flank of their 3rd Army with the object of hitting the flank of the "blue" attack force and took all necessary precautions to block the "blue" advance on Kiev.

In the second stage, the "blues" continued their drive towards Kiev and dropped paratroopers in the "red" rear east of the city. The "reds" rushed the 135th Machine-Gun Battalion, 2nd Mechanised Regiment and 49th Cavalry Regiment from Kiev to frustrate the air drop. The "red" 45th Mechanised Corps reinforced by infantry mounted a counter-offensive in the morning of September 14 and its main force crashed through into the rear of the "blues".

Towards the end of September 15 the "hostilities" were terminated, and on the following day we held a critique. Yakir made a detailed analysis of all troop movements and intimated the probable subsequent developments. Yegorov, too, made a number of important and far-sighted points. He said, among other things, that the manoeuvres had confirmed the basic elements of the Provisional Instructions on Battle in Depth, since breaching a fortified zone—the principal task set all service arms—had been coped with satisfactorily.

The Chief of the General Staff noted that the air force had shown its efficiency throughout the manoeuvres and in all types of combat. Particularly, he praised the performance of the assault planes.

He described the air-borne invasion as brilliant, both organisationally and technically, and commended the tempo of deployment, the manoeuvrability and firing. In conclusion, Yegorov said the manoeuvres had all the makings of a truly up-to-date operation. He said they had lived up

to the principle of the utmost manoeuvrability, which they owed to the air force, the motorised troops and cavalry. The general set up had presented most difficult conditions for all arms, he said, requiring tenacity and discipline, coupled with firm organisational supervision and unintermittent control. In Yegorov's opinion, the manoeuvres had yielded a surfeit of valuable pointers for the troops involved in them and the Red Army as a whole.

The Soviet combat vehicles proved highly enduring. Of the more than 4,000 vehicles employed in the games, not more than ten had suffered minor breakdowns, quickly repaired.

The big mechanised and tank units proved in the field that they were a factor which radically altered the nature of combat.

It was the consensus at the time that mechanised and tank units had shown immense striking power and the highest degree of manoeuvrability.

The People's Commissar for Defence issued an exhaustive order of the day on the results of the manoeuvres, delving into all the aspects verified in them and formulating the pertinent tasks of tactical and operational training. Iona Yakir, the Commander of the Kiev Military District, the other top generals and all troops that took part in the manoeuvres were commended for good organisation and leadership.

The 1935 manoeuvres held a prominent place among other similar exercises of the time in our own country, and abroad. For the first time, deep operational thrusts and the tactics of combat in depth had been developed and verified in large-scale games. Priority in developing and applying the principles and methods of battle in depth thus belongs to Soviet military science. Massive use of mobile troops, and their interaction, was another novel factor in deep assaults. This implied co-ordinated employment of the air arm, mechanised troops and cavalry (which was also mechanised, every cavalry division having a tank regiment, anti-aircraft batteries, motor vehicles, etc.).

The same may be said about the air drops designed to frustrate deployment of "enemy" reserves and enable the attacking force to crush the "enemy" piecemeal in operations aimed at capturing a large city.

A number of important aspects concerning the tactics of battle in depth was elucidated, such as defence by an infantry division, breaching of modern defences, deployment of troops to exploit a breach, manoeuvres aimed at encircling the enemy, actions of assault planes against enemy battle lines, anti-aircraft defence of troops and a large city, and the operation of a mobile unit in crushing an air-borne invasion.

Unfortunately, the results of the manoeuvres also benefited foreign armies, and the German Wehrmacht most of all. Foreign strategists availed themselves of the experience of air-borne invasions and deep operational drives by mobile troops designed to encircle and annihilate important enemy groupings, and of the principle of close co-operation between mobile troops and the air arm. A group of foreign officers (about 20 Frenchmen, Czechs and Italians) had attended the manoeuvres and the subsequent critique.* None of the Hitler generals deny in their memoirs that they took advantage of the Soviet experience in building up their air-borne troops.**

Lamentably, many of the positive aspects of the Soviet military doctrine so conclusively confirmed in the Kiev manoeuvres were consigned to oblivion due to Stalin's faulty treatment of the question of defence and to the purging of the top Soviet generals of the time. It was not until the eve of the nazi attack, after the Second World War had been raging for many months in the West, demonstrating that the basic principles of the 1935 manoeuvres were correct, that we reverted to them, as the major Moscow military conference in December 1940 (of which more later) shows, though no mention was made of the men who had developed them, for they had become the prey of groundless repressions.

After finishing the Frunze Military Academy, which was of the greatest benefit to me, I was appointed Commander of the 14th Cavalry Division, in which I had served before. In June 1938 I was shifted to command the 6th Cossack

* The French delegation was headed by Brigadier General Lucien Loiseau (Deputy Chief of the French General Staff), the Czech by General Kreiči (of the Czech General Staff), and the Italian by General Monti.

** See *Itogi mirovoi voiny*, Moscow, 1957, p. 241.

Cavalry Corps, which consisted of the old divisions of the 1st Mounted Army, which had covered itself with glory in the Civil War.

I was deeply preoccupied training my corps while ominous clouds of war were gathering over the world. After seizing Austria and Czechoslovakia, Hitler and the German monopolists who backed him decided that the situation was ripe for a large-scale war for world supremacy. A series of crude "diplomatic" actions and rigged incidents on the Polish border was followed by a nazi military assault on Poland on September 1, 1939.

In face of the mounting war threat, the Soviet Union did its utmost to build up a united front of freedom-loving peoples to foil the aggressive nazi plans. But the governing circles in Britain and France, backed by the U.S. imperialists and blinded by their hatred of communism, turned a deaf ear to the Soviet appeals and criminally condoned nazi aggressiveness.

The Soviet Government had no choice but to conclude a non-aggression treaty with Germany and take a series of measures to shore up the security of the U.S.S.R., particularly its Western frontiers.

The reunification of Western Byelorussia and the Western Ukraine, seized by capitalist Poland in 1920, with Soviet Byelorussia and the Soviet Ukraine (and the deployment there of Soviet troops) was an important action in this context. When capitalist Poland collapsed under the Wehrmacht's onslaught, these areas were threatened by nazi enslavement and would have made convenient springboards for a nazi attack on the U.S.S.R. "The reunification was a campaign of liberation," says the History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union. "It saved the population of the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia and blocked the spread of nazi aggression eastward. The troops had had to employ methods different from those usually recommended in military manuals. The Red Army maintained the utmost degree of discipline and organisation and was prepared at all times to repulse the enemy when liberating the people in the Western parts of Byelorussia and the Ukraine from the oppression of Polish landowners and German invaders, bringing them peace

instead, and deliverance from poverty and physical extermination.”*

The 6th Cossack Cavalry Corps, of which I was in command, took part in the Western Byelorussia campaign. Between September 10 and 16, 1939, the Corps concentrated in and around Uzda and Negoreloye, and was readied for action.

Two days before the frontier was crossed, M. P. Kovalyov, Army Commander, Second Rank, who was in charge of the Special Byelorussian Military District, called a conference of top officers and announced that in view of the nazi advance into Poland, the Soviet Government had decided to take the lives and property of citizens in Western Byelorussia and the Western Ukraine under its protection by sending Soviet troops there.

We were to cross the frontier on September 17.

A combined mechanised and cavalry group was formed for the move. My Corps was to advance across unknown difficult terrain in two directions—the southern which was more favourable and the northern, across woods and marshes, criss-crossed by numerous canals, considered impassable for large units and heavy arms.

The operational order was issued at 17.00 hours on September 16. It defined the specific tasks of all our divisions. The order stressed that it ought to be brought home to the personnel that we were entering as liberators a land once captured by Polish counter-revolutionaries. The Red Army soldier, it said, had to be good to the people who had for many years lived under foreign rule. It called for a high standard of discipline and organisation on the march. The local population had to be protected against gendarmes and reactionaries, and the property of all Polish and Byelorussian citizens was to be respected. Polish servicemen and government employees were to be treated with respect, unless they rendered armed resistance. Air bombings of towns and villages, and artillery bombardments, were totally ruled out.

We were determined to avoid every possible misunderstanding, and wondered how and where we would come

* *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soyuz, 1941-1945*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1960, pp. 247-48.

into contact with the German troops. The Red Army's mission of liberation, after all, was begun after the German troops had already come to the Western Bug and the San, reaching the border of the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, and crossing to the eastern banks of these rivers at some points with the intention of continuing their advance farther east. Each one of us knew that despite the non-aggression pact concluded three weeks before (August 23, 1939) the German nazis were enemies.

Our officers had emphatic instructions to avoid giving cause for armed provocations needlessly on coming into contact with the German troops, but also not to let them seize areas inhabited by Ukrainians and Byelorussians. We had to act firmly and advance quickly. If any nazi unit would mount an armed action against us, however, we were to retaliate. This did indeed happen here and there.

At the appointed hour, we moved rapidly across the frontier. Kovalyov and I drove to the frontier at Rubezhevichi. On a hillock, on the fringe of a forest, stood border sign 777 with a Soviet coat of arms on the side facing our country. This sign attracted our attention. For nearly 20 years it had divided Byelorussia into two parts. Our brothers and sisters languished under reactionary Polish rule on the other side. Now, they faced the prospect of still more brutal, nazi rule. It was up to us to help them.

Kovalyov saw how pensively I looked westward, put his hand on my shoulder and asked:

"What are you thinking about? We have gone off to a good start."

I looked around and said:

"I am thinking of taking border sign 777 along with us to the new frontier and putting it where our government orders."

"Excellent idea! Let it stand where our new, just frontier will be."

I ordered the men to dig up the sign and put it on one of the lorries of the 6th Cavalry Division. The border sign travelled with us to the west.

We were making good headway. It was clear that we could move forward ahead of schedule. So we decided to enter Novogrudok, the home town of Adam Mickiewicz,

the great Polish poet, by the end of the day instead of on the following day. A mobile group consisting of the 31st Tank Regiment, a motorised infantry battalion and an AA artillery unit entered Novogrudok after a nearly 100-kilometre march from the border by 20.00 on September 17.

The town presented a strange sight at first. It seemed empty. The streets were deserted. The silence was complete. Shortly before our arrival, the Polish nationalists had scared the population with tales about Red Army "cruelty". But the lie was short-lived. When the cautious townsmen saw that our tanks and machine guns did not fire at houses and that our soldiers were a smiling friendly bunch, the people came out into the streets despite the late hour. A spontaneous demonstration took place. Women presented flowers to our soldiers. Shouts of greeting were chanted. As we marched through the town we heard people shout in Polish, Byelorussian and Russian: "Long live the Red Army!", "Long live the Soviet Union!"

Our tank regiments were integrated in a mobile group in order to speed up the westward advance. We entered the town of Volkovysk the following day, and then also Grodno and Bielostok.

By and large, things were going swimmingly. Yet there were annoyances, too. When checking the preparedness of our tanks for the further advance, I discovered there was barely enough fuel for them to reach Volkovysk, and this only if they were used as transports. Yet they were war vehicles and ought to be ready for action at any moment, which would consume more fuel. Our logistics, I saw, were not up to the mark. Fuel had not been brought up quickly enough for our rapidly advancing troops.

Ultimately, we decided to take the fuel of every third tank and give it to the other two. That made two-thirds of the tanks and armoured cars fully serviceable, while one-third of the vehicles would stay behind and wait for the fuel. It stands to reason that this refuelling caused a delay.

In the morning of September 19 we approached Volkovysk.

We encountered no resistance, and entered the city. Despite the early hour, the population, Poles and Byelorussians alike, crowded the streets dressed in their Sunday best. They stopped our vehicles and showered us with

questions. News of our entering Western Byelorussia spread like wildfire. The population knew Soviet troops had come to liberate the working people.

It was a pleasure to see the inhabitants embracing and kissing our grimy tankers, gunners and infantrymen in the streets, and to hear Byelorussian and Russian speech all round us.

After liberating Volkovysk we received orders to send our tank force and a cavalry division in the direction of Grodno.

After occupying Grodno, we continued our westward advance.

The 4th Cavalry Division was ordered to move to Augustov and Suvalki. The other divisions headed towards Bielostok and Byelovezhskaya Pushcha.

Very soon, at some point or another, two armies were to make contact—the Red Army on its mission of liberation, and the nazi Wehrmacht on its predatory mission. The encounter occurred in Bielostok. By the time we came to the city the nazis were in possession of it. We suggested that they withdraw. They agreed on the condition that a Soviet unit of not more than 120 men should first come to Bielostok, and that our other units would not enter the city until after the nazi troops withdrew.

At first we wondered why the Germans set this condition. Then we realised they did not want their soldiers to see the friendly welcome our army would get, while they were being treated with undisguised contempt by the people of Bielostok.

But the matter was relatively unimportant, and I consented. We picked 120 men of the Cossack 6th Cavalry Division and dressed them in new uniforms. I inspected them before they left and briefed their commander, Col. I. Pliyev.

When our Cossacks entered the city, the manifestation the nazis had wished to avoid took place all the same. Our men came to the central square, where the nazi HQ was quartered. The news that Soviet troops had come to Bielostok spread instantly. Crowds filled the streets that had been deserted only a minute before. Our men were surrounded by thousands of townsmen. They were embraced and flowers were showered upon them.

The nazi command watched this scene with ill-concealed irritation. The contrast between the reception given to the Wehrmacht spoke of the abyss that divided us, soldiers representing two different states, two different worlds.

The German units were to evacuate Bielostok in the evening. But they did it long before. At 16.00 hours, when I came to Bielostok, I did not have the chance of seeing any of the German officers, if only to express my "regret" over the fact that they had succeeded in plundering the city so substantially during their few days in control.

I spent the rest of the day and the day that followed inspecting the city and its environs. The atmosphere in Bielostok was festive. This demonstration of joy was quite understandable. The townspeople had thought Bielostok would fall to the Germans and had already had a taste of the "new order". Besides, they had heard enough about nazi brutality from refugees who streamed in from Western areas.

I examined the military installations in Bielostok. The airfield worried me most. It had to be put in order for the landing of heavy planes.

A week before our march into Western Byelorussia we spotted essential failings in the work of our logistics, which was unable to ensure unintermittent supplies, particularly of fuel. I did not know how matters stood with the other units, but our own Corps experienced distinct shortages. In Bielostok, too, our fuel supplies ran short. I was compelled to ask for an emergency airlift. Evidently, I was not the only one plagued by such shortages, for on the following day air transports arrived with the requisite fuel.

Our troops crossed the Bug westward. I had come to the town of Sokoluv when an order came to halt, pending further orders. We marked time for two days, until I learned at a specially convened conference that all of us were to withdraw to the eastern bank of the Bug.

When I returned from the conference, my chief of staff told me a representative of the German Command had called. Since I was absent, he was told to come again at 9.00 hours the following day.

A German general accompanied by two officers came at 9.00 sharp. I was to conduct diplomatic negotiations with

representatives of the nazi command, not knowing then that less than two years hence I would have to speak an entirely different language with them. But it was already clear to me that they had more than enough arrogance and cheek.

Taking it for granted that we were to begin our withdrawal across the Bug immediately and that there was no need to discuss the time of our departure, the general demanded haughtily that we should instantly allow the nazi command to instal a supply base in Sokoluv.

I kept a grip on myself and said:

"You seem to forget, Herr General, that you are speaking to a Soviet general. Our armies are not at war, and you are not a victor. I think it will be better if we negotiate, instead of setting conditions and making demands."

The General had not expected this retort. He was taken aback and said something curtly to his officers. Then he added:

"Very well. Let's negotiate."

"That's better," I replied calmly. "I have to say before we start that I shall not be able to withdraw my troops across the Bug in anything less than five days, because the German troops have demolished the bridges and new ones will have to be put up. For this reason, I cannot allow you to set up a supply base within the limits of my dispositions."

"Why so?" the German spokesman said cockily. "As far as I know, you crossed the Bug in less than a day and advanced 30 kilometres."

"You and I," I replied, "are old soldiers and ought to know that it is one thing to advance or withdraw for combat, and quite another thing to withdraw according to plan by mutual agreement."

While this was being interpreted to the General, I added:

"May I take the liberty of asking why Herr General is in such a terrible hurry?"

But I got no reply.

The German spokesman became more amenable and we agreed that our troops would withdraw across the Bug in four days, that the Germans would not set up their supply base and that they would be allowed to inspect Sokoluv station in the presence of our liaison officers. This ended our negotiations.

A few days later our troops withdrew across the Bug and moved to their permanent dislocations.

Border troops were stationed along the new frontier, and border sign 777 was placed at Ostrolenki, where a road merging with the Bielostok-Warsaw highway crossed the Narev River.

The liberation campaign of the Red Army in Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine had a far-reaching military and political effect. It was a major victory for Soviet foreign policy. In a matter of 12 to 15 days Soviet troops liberated 196,000 sq. kilometres of territory and a population of several million, the majority of whom were Ukrainians and Byelorussians.

The move was highly effective strategically, because it gave the Soviet Union an opportunity to extend its fortifications to the western margin of the Ukraine and Byelorussia.

By attacking Poland on September 1, 1939, Germany touched off the Second World War, which developed into a huge conflagration. On September 3, France and Britain declared war on Germany, with Australia and New Zealand following suit on the same day. A number of other countries, too, announced a state of emergency and general mobilisation.

The peoples of Britain and France, whose governments had continuously encouraged the aggressors to attack the Soviet Union, had to pay a heavy price for this unwise policy of their rulers.

The nazi drive eastward and the outbreak of the Second World War compelled the Soviet Union to reinforce its western and north-western frontiers, and the approaches to them. This was doubly necessary, because Germany's nazi rulers were intent on using the territory of the Baltic states and Finland as springboards against the U.S.S.R.

To forestall them, the Soviet Government entered into negotiations with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, suggesting mutual assistance pacts based on mutual respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and non-interference in domestic affairs. This, the Soviet Union pointed out, would effectively promote the interests of all the countries concerned and, what was most important, lessen the menace of a nazi aggression.

Under popular pressure, though very unwillingly, the bourgeois rulers of the three Baltic countries were forced to conclude treaties with the U.S.S.R. The pacts were signed in September and October 1939. They permitted the Soviet Union to station military garrisons and build Soviet airfields and naval bases in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This was quickly done: the necessary troops were deployed to the Baltic states without delay.

The Finnish Government, on the other hand, refused to conclude the suggested pact. It concealed its ties with nazi Germany and was extensively aided by Britain, France and the United States. It provoked a war with the U.S.S.R., in which the Finnish troops were smashed in and around the Karelian Isthmus. A Soviet-Finnish peace treaty was concluded on March 12, 1940. Under its terms the Soviet defences against nazi aggression in the north were greatly improved. The Soviet defences in the Leningrad area were moved 150 kilometres north-westward from the city.

The Soviet Government sought to improve good-neighbour relations with the Baltic states on the strength of the mutual assistance treaties, but the reactionary governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia scorned all Soviet efforts and entered into negotiations with Hitler Germany behind the backs of their peoples. At the suggestion of the nazis, they concluded a secret tripartite military alliance against the U.S.S.R. and undertook hostile anti-Soviet actions. The Soviet Union could not countenance this situation, which prejudiced its defences, and handed notes of protest to the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian governments on June 14, 1940.

When a showdown loomed large in the summer of 1940, the 6th Cavalry Corps was shifted closer to the Lithuanian border. In the morning of June 15, 1940, we received word that the Lithuanian Government had accepted the Soviet proposals set out in the Note of June 14. Lithuanian President Antanas Smetona and a few leading government officials belonging to his clique fled to Germany, thereby betraying their close ties with the nazis. The 6th Cavalry Corps was ordered to head for Kaunas. Later, its units were stationed in Kretinga, Palanga, Gordzeja and Retavas. Everywhere, we established contact with Lithuanian troops

and, I must say in all fairness, they treated us well. Their officers were quite willing to make room for us and to help us quarter our troops. Only a few of the officers were hostile.

The establishment of a new Lithuanian Government, the bulk of which consisted of people known for their revolutionary sentiments and opposition to the old order, changed the atmosphere in the country. The people's revolutionary initiative expanded. Mass meetings and demonstrations swept the country, calling for the establishment of Soviet power and entry into the Soviet Union. Those were also the principal slogans during the elections to the new Sejm. In July 1940, the Lithuanian Sejm, elected by the people in free democratic elections, decided to adopt the Soviet system.

Developments in Estonia and Latvia followed a similar course. The newly elected Sejm of Latvia and the State Duma in Estonia also adopted the Soviet system. This ushered in a new chapter in the history of the Baltic states. On August 1, 1940, the Seventh Session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. complied with their request and admitted them to the Soviet Union.

The admission of the three Baltic states, Western Byelorussia, Western Ukraine and, later, of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, to the Soviet Union had a farreaching effect for their peoples.

Firstly, their liberation dispelled the menace of nazi enslavement and delivered more than 23 million people from capitalist exploitation and national oppression.

Secondly, their reunification with the Soviet Union shifted the Soviet frontier farther west from the country's important centres. The building was begun of a new line of fortifications against the imminent nazi aggression. Soviet troops advanced to the Baltic shore, to the banks of the Bug and San rivers in the west, and the banks of the Prut and Danube in the south-west. The nazis thus lost important staging areas for their impending attack on the U.S.S.R. The creation of a Soviet "front" blocking the nazi road eastward and robbing the nazis of initiative for some time in that part of Europe proved a key factor in the further development of events connected with the war against German fascism.

I have heard it said that militarily the reunification of the Western territories had had a dual effect—negative, as well as positive. References are made to the sad state of affairs in the early period of the Great Patriotic War. In my opinion, too, there had been mistakes and unnecessary delays in preparing the new frontier area for war, while fortifications along the old frontier were prematurely abandoned. However, if our strategic anticipation of impending events had been more accurate, the reunified territories would have played a most beneficial role.

About a fortnight after we had moved to our new stations in Lithuania and begun systematic training, I received orders to turn my command over to General Ivan Nikitin and report to district IIQ in Minsk.

I had no inkling of what awaited me there, and was reluctant to leave the corps I had grown fond of in the two years I had been with it. All of us, the men and the officers, had made distinct progress in our training. The 6th Corps was considered one of the best prepared Red Army commands. My departure ended the period of more than 20 years that I had served in the cavalry.

At Minsk I learned about the decision of the Party Central Committee and the Soviet Government to form new large mechanised units. I was charged with organising the 3rd Mechanised Corps.

To keep abreast of modern developments, the army had to be motorised and mechanised. Yet this crucial matter depended entirely on the nation's resources, on the level of socialist industry. Motorisation and mechanisation of the army began at the time of the First Five Year Plan. A special Red Army Department was set up in 1929 to handle all matters related to the motorisation and mechanisation of the Soviet Armed Forces, as well as the formation and training of special mechanised units.

The 1st Red Army Mechanised Brigade was activated in 1931. The next year, in Moscow, it formed the nucleus of the 1st Mechanised Corps, consisting of two mechanised and one infantry brigades. Two more mechanised corps were formed in 1932—one in Leningrad and another in Kiev.

The Red Army was ahead of the Western armies in this respect. It was not until 1934 that Britain and France,

for example, formed their first experimental mechanised units.

Subsequently, some Soviet commanders who had taken part in the Spanish war against Franco returned with ideas based on the limited and unique experience of that war. They maintained that tank battalions within infantry divisions and corps, rather than large armoured and motorised units, were desirable for modern warfare, they also recommended separate brigades attached to divisions and corps.

This incorrect viewpoint, which conflicted with the results of the 1935 manoeuvres, took precedence for a while. The existing mechanised corps were dissolved in 1938. The new move retarded the development of Soviet tank and mechanised troops for at least two years. Soon, the fallacy of this was realised, and the Red Army reverted again, though timidly at first, to the idea of mechanised corps, for the views of the major Soviet theorists and generals, such as Tukhachevsky and Yegorov, were confirmed in the early war operations in Europe. Mechanised corps—the most mobile of troops adequately equipped with modern weapons—were able, as we saw, to carry out major independent operations in collaboration with other arms. Their advantage over infantry in deep operational offensives and flanking thrusts was revealed clearly in the Kiev manoeuvres.

I was pleased to get the assignment of forming a mechanised corps. I went to Vilnius at once, where I arrived on July 15, and instantly tackled my new job. The new corps was to be dislocated in Vilnius, Alitus, Ukmerge and Keidan.

Forming or reorganising has always been tied up with organisational difficulties and problems of equipment and supply. Forming the 3rd Mechanised Corps was especially difficult. To begin with, it had to be done in Lithuania, which was itself in the throes of a “reorganisational period”, a period of the consolidation of Soviet power.

Secondly, the 3rd Mechanised Corps was being formed not of trained and technically equipped units. Its nucleus consisted of a variety of detachments and units of different specialities. There were engineer troops, infantry, cavalry

and artillery units, tank battalions, etc., which had to be welded together and equipped with new weapons. We did not get all the tanks and weapons in one lot, and the retraining of personnel had therefore to be gradual.

The orders were to reduce the formative period to the minimum and to begin systematic combat training as quickly as possible. Time would not wait. The situation was alarming. A war raged in the West. We had to make the corps combat efficient in the shortest practicable time.

The body of officers was well aware of this and laboured arduously.

While whipping the units into order, I saw to it that combat training began at once. I, too, was eager to learn as much as I could about tank warfare, to study tank tactics and the organisation of tank control. We trained day and night in any kind of weather and the worse the conditions were, the better I liked it.

Training yielded good results. Despite its recent vintage, the 3rd Mechanised Corps was commended as one of the best in the Red Army, and ranked first among the mechanised units. The People's Commissar for Defence announced this at a top-ranking conference in December 1940.

I did not stay long with the corps—June to December 1940—but my short shift with it was crammed with strenuous effort, and I was immensely pleased with what the officers and men of the corps did to build up another powerful Red Army fighting unit.

In the latter half of December and early January 1941 we held a top-level military council in Moscow. The Great Patriotic War, as it developed, was only six months away. Our conference did the Red Army generals a lot of good, for it was a kind of priming ground in tactical and operational craft, military strategy and offensive as well as defensive operations. This is why I would like to speak about it at greater length.

Our work at the conference was broken down under five heads.

The first was devoted to a review of the military and political training of 1940 and the tasks for 1941. General of the Army Kirill Meretskov, who was then Chief of the General Staff, delivered a report on this subject, covering many aspects of combat training. Meretskov noted, among

other things, that definite progress had been made in tactical training, which enhanced the mobility of infantry.

Speaking on defence, Meretskov advocated the organisation of combat zones that would enable us to channel an enemy offensive into areas best suited to ourselves, where it would be frustrated by artillery and air operations before reaching our outer defences. Meretskov stressed that the troops had learned to organise such zones, but were not yet sufficiently trained to overcome enemy zones of the same kind. Besides, he pointed out, the body of generals had not yet learned the art of assessing the situation and organising reconnaissance.

Speaking about the artillery, Meretskov noted that it had coped with its tasks of 1940, and specially commended the artillery force of the special Kiev Military District.

The air arm, he noted, had lately had good practice in supporting ground forces. This had helped to explore and grasp the special elements that air support contributed to an offensive battle. Air, he observed, had changed the nature of offensive fighting. Practice showed, among other things, that aircraft could attack, bomb and strafe battle lines and give fire support to attacking infantry. Meretskov pointed out that many of the air force chiefs had revised their approach to raids on the enemy rear unassociated with operations by other arms.

Meretskov's report contained a lot of meat, numerous facts and figures, and gave the troops many new problems to solve in 1941. The Chief of the General Staff pointed out, among other things, that it was essential to work out instructions on combat tactics in depth and other types of combat for all arms in order to achieve a common approach and dovetail training methods. The report and our subsequent debate were pervaded with the spirit of the 1935 manoeuvres, although the men who had planned and directed the manoeuvres were no longer with us.

The speakers made many valuable suggestions as to training policies. Among them were twenty-eight generals, including the Infantry Inspector, the Chief of the Military Training Department, the chiefs of service arms, department heads, commanders of some of the military districts and a few corps commanders.

The second part of the conference was devoted to

theoretical problems. The reports were made by General of the Army Georgi Zhukov (on the nature of a modern offensive operation), General of the Army Ivan Tyulenev (on the nature of a modern defensive operation), Col.-Gen. Dmitry Pavlov (on the employment of mechanised corps in an offensive), Air Lt.-Gen. Pavel Rychagov (on the air arm in an offensive operation and in gaining control of the air), and Infantry Inspector Lt.-Gen. Andrei Smirnov (on an infantry division in attack and defence).

The discussion of Zhukov's report was quite incisive. Seven leading generals took the floor. The report and the subsequent comment concerned key problems of the operational art, military strategy and the Soviet military doctrine. Some of the notions set out in the report were attacked, and many valuable and highly pertinent ideas were put forward. Lt.-Gen. Porfiry Romanenko, Commander of the 1st Mechanised Corps, levelled highly pertinent criticism. It would not be amiss, therefore, to quote him here at some length. Here is what he said:

"I take the liberty to cast doubt on General Zhukov's notions about the nature and motive powers of a modern offensive operation. I think his ideas date to 1932-34, because they are based on relatively scant mechanisation. A lot has changed since then. Though he has analysed Western experience, he has, in my opinion, drawn the wrong conclusions. It is quite true that the German army performed its offensive operations chiefly with mechanised and air force units. But General Zhukov did not show us how this was done. To begin with, I think it is necessary to draw the attention of our generals to the fact that Reichenau's mechanised army group was the decisive factor in the successful German operation in the West. Reichenau's mobile group struck out towards Namur, north of Sedan, and slashed through the French and Belgian front. Next, it completed the encirclement of the allied group of armies in Belgium. In a nutshell, it played the decisive role in France's final and crushing defeat.

"I think we ought to note that the Germans, who have much fewer tanks than we, realised that striking power in modern warfare aggregates from mechanised, tank and air units. The Germans assembled their tanks and motorised troops into operational formations. They massed and

engaged them in independent decisive operations. This was how they achieved important successes.

"In my belief we should form shock armies of three or four mechanised corps, two or three air force corps, one or two paratroop divisions, and nine to twelve artillery regiments. If two such armies are deployed on the internal and external flanks of two adjoining fronts, they will crush the enemy front and will not let him recover before we complete our action, developing an operational success into a strategic one."

In his summing up, Porfiry Romanenko said:

"I am sure there will be objections to my proposal. All I ask is that you bear in mind that I have been working on this problem for a number of years and, I think, have studied the matter thoroughly. If we have no shock armies of mechanised units with strong air support, we shall run into difficulties and jeopardise the future of our country."

As Romanenko had anticipated, the objectors were many. Filipp Golikov and a few other generals remonstrated against his notion of massing mechanised troops. All the same, Romanenko's proposals were valuable and timely, though some of his points were controversial. The kind of units a mechanised army should consist of and a few other details of his project needed further study, but his main idea was indubitably sound. It was borne out in the war, when the pressure of events compelled us to form mobile tank armies under considerable stress.

A number of conclusions was drawn in relation to Zhukov's report. Here was what they amounted to: in modern times, when armies had powerful technical weapons (tanks, planes, general motorisation of troops), the attacker is able to affect enemy morale, destroy his troops in the field and break down his fortified and deep defences through close co-operation of the air force, tanks, artillery and infantry; by breaching the enemy's tactical defence zone and sending a strong mobile force into the breach, the attacker is able to smash the enemy's operational reserves and develop the operational success into a strategic one; by a combined powerful and sudden thrust of ground forces, air-borne troops and the air force, the attacker can crush the enemy's air force in the operational and strategic area and gain uncontested control of the sky.

This amounted to an outright recognition of Tukhachevsky's and Yegorov's ideas concerning operations in depth.

General of the Army Ivan Tyulenev produced a well-reasoned description of modern defences in the second report and drew the conclusion that modern defences have to be enduring and well distributed in depth, with extensive employment of obstacles, particularly anti-tank. Defences, he summed up, had to be primarily anti-tank and anti-aircraft.

Tyulenev and other speakers stressed rightly that the strength of the Soviet defence system hinged on the tenacity of the Soviet troops, on the good organisation of Soviet positions, particularly the switch positions, and on the efficient Soviet system of fire, particularly of flank fire. Mention was made of the proper organisation of forward defence positions, the main zone of resistance and of the second line of defence.

Col.-Gen. Dmitry Pavlov, Commander of the Special Byelorussian Military District, made the third report. Ten speakers took the floor in discussing it. The question of sending tank corps into the breach was raised for the first time, and naturally touched off a stormy discussion. I, too, had my say on this score.

"I see eye to eye with General Pavlov," I said, "and believe that his approach is highly pertinent and novel in principle. Modern offensive and defensive operations are worlds removed from those of the 1914-18 war. Tanks and planes have grown into powerful service arms. They have changed the nature of operations, and have become decisive factors in battle.

"We say that tanks are the most 'fashionable' weapon of our time. Why so? Because the tank has fire and striking power and armour, and because it is highly mobile and manoeuvrable. All this makes the tanks the most effective of the attacking arms. Tanks are best adapted for attack and counter-attack.

"Tanks are classified as troop tanks and strategic-purpose tanks depending on the nature of their employment. Troop tanks open up the trail for the infantry into the depth of enemy defence lines. They destroy and neutralise enemy machine guns, mortars and guns. Troop tanks strike with artillery and air support, while the infantry, which follows

up the tank attack, mops up the enemy, seizes territory and consolidates the success.

"I shall say no more about troop tanks. What I want is to examine the functions of the strategic-purpose tanks.

"The operational principle of engaging main forces in the main and decisive sector is still valid.

"In order to crush enemy units piecemeal his battle formations have first to be broken into pieces. His organisational cohesion, his dispositions along the front and in depth, have to be torn apart. It is tanks in co operation with mechanised infantry, with the cavalry and air force, that have to do this."

Further, I touched on the matter of sending a tank corps into the breach, specifying the width of the breach into which a mechanised corps could justifiably be sent.

"Picture the disposition of the corps when entering the breach," I said. "It has to be ready to engage the enemy in battle. Suppose we take a regiment—it has to move along two routes, with two battalions in each column. For the regiment to deploy two forward battalions, the battalions have to be organised in two echelons. The first of these should consist of, say, 30 tanks advancing at 50-metre intervals. This means the battalion will have a front of 1.5 kilometres. The neighbouring battalion will also occupy 1.5 kilometres. All in all, the regiment will need a front of 3 kilometres and two regiments a front of 6-7 kilometres. This is the frontage of a divisional breach. A mechanised corps consists of two divisions. This means its first echelon will have a frontage of 14 kilometres without intervals and a frontage of 16 to 20 kilometres with intervals. This, I believe, is the frontage a mechanised corps needs for entering a breach.

"In considering the depth of the formation in which a mechanised corps enters a breach, we should make another simple calculation. The column depth of a division is 100 kilometres. If the division advances along four routes, this depth shrinks to 25 kilometres. The second echelon of a mechanised corps, that is, a motorised division following several routes, is about 16 kilometres deep. The depth of a corps in combat formation thus amounts to about 40 kilometres, provided, as I have said, that the breach frontage amounts to about 20 kilometres.

"The next thing to examine is when to send a mechanised corps into the breach. Some of the preceding speakers pointed out this should be done after we breach the second line of defence. I think if we wait so long, we may be robbed of the opportunity of entering the breach at all. We have to send in the exploiting echelon, that is, the mechanised corps, as soon as enemy defences are breached along a 6-kilometre frontage in order to seize the enemy's second line of defence in stride. If we don't, the enemy will have time to dig in and we shall have to organise a new breach to overwhelm the second line of defence. This cannot be done on the same day, that is, on the day we breach the first tactical line of defence. It will have to be done on the following day, or even later. Admittedly, in some cases we shall indeed have to wait until the second line is breached, that is, organise a new artillery bombardment and infantry attack with all the effort this entails. But such cases should be reduced to the minimum.

"The most important thing, I think, is the question of controlling tank and mechanised troops during an operation in depth. Let me give you an example. When the Germans flung their mobile groups against Sedan and onward to Cambrai after breaching the Franco-Belgian line of defence, they encountered and engaged an Anglo-French force that had more than 1,000 tanks. A tank battle ensued. It lasted 8 hours. The Germans won it chiefly because control of their mobile troops in depth was better organised. Besides corps, they had mobile army groups, which the French and English did not have. The Anglo-French mobile forces lacked co ordination and unified control. Neither did they have a clear cut doctrine of mechanised fighting.

"What I want to stress is that we ought to build up control and avoid such mishaps as we had at Novogradok and Volkovysk during the campaign in Western Byelorussia, where our mechanised cavalry group got entangled with other mobile units and we had a lot of trouble sorting out the troops and restoring control."

I was eager to back up Portiry Romanenko and prod our top commanders into massing mobile troops. Also, I touched on the supply of fuel and lubricants for mechanised troops. This was another big problem. Here is what I said:

"Preceding speakers mentioned supplying fuel to mechanised troops by air. The Germans used air drops for this purpose. We, too, have made a few attempts. When we approached Biełostok I remember finding our gas tanks empty. So fuel was flown to us. A similar situation occurred with Petrov's corps at Grodno. Fuel was parachuted to him. Our practical experiences have led me to conclude that air-lifting fuel is inadequate. It may be alright in exceptional cases, but what we need are vehicles carrying about 20 tons of gasoline. It may be a good idea to lay pipelines in the wake of advancing units for all of 180-200 kilometres.

"I hope we shall consider the question I have raised thoroughly."

Those were my views of a quarter century ago. Not all of them were flawless, but many were confirmed in the war that soon followed.

General conclusions were drawn in connection with Pavlov's report and the ensuing debate. We agreed, for one, that tank and mechanised corps, being units of immense striking power, could co operate with other arms in mobile warfare to frustrate concentration and deployment of the main enemy forces, to invest and destroy the main enemy troop concentrations, to strike at the enemy's flanks and rear, to destroy enemy troops jointly with units operating frontally, and, last but not least, help our own troops build up new concentrations for subsequent thrusts.

We agreed, too, that tank and mechanised corps were the most mobile troop formation. A modern mechanised corps, we agreed, was stronger than a tank corps, and better able to exploit a frontal breach, follow up a thrust in depth and turn a tactical breach into an operational one.

The fourth report was made by Air Force Commander Lt.-Gen. Pavel Rychagov. He dwelt on the following questions: a) winning control of the air, b) air co-operation with ground forces in combat, c) covering troops and districts from enemy air-raids, d) raiding enemy operational and strategic reserves, troops and operational rear, e) air reconnaissance, f) air-lifting of paratroops, g) air-lifting supplies to troops that lost contact with their supply base, or for other reasons.

Rychagov produced sound recommendations, supported with calculations and experience. They certainly deserved

our closest attention. Subsequent speakers generally agreed with Rychagov, but made certain critical observations. Listing all the issues dealt with in the report and the subsequent discussion would serve no useful purpose here. There were enough of them for a special book. But a few points are worth mentioning.

Air Mj-Gen. Kozlov stressed, for example, that winning control of the air was up to the air arm of a front, rather than of an army. Lt. Gen. M. Popov pointed out that "the fight for strategic air supremacy is the competence of the High Command and Front Command, and transcends the competence of army commanders".

Air Mj-Gen. Grigory Kravchenko objected to decentralising the air force, that is distributing air units among corps and divisions. He was very emphatic in taking issue with this tendency.

The next report was made by Lt.-Gen. Andrei Smirnov, Inspector of the Infantry.

He examined questions related to defensive operations by an infantry division and dwelt at length on computations of the necessary strength and weapons for divisional defence, the organisation of combat in the forward positions, the main zone of defence, and defence in depth. "The backbone," he said, "is the battalion line of defence." He pointed to the grown responsibilities of platoon and company commanders, particularly when battles were fought in depth.

In dealing with an infantry division's offensive, Smirnov concentrated on the breaching of the main enemy defence line which, he said, was the most difficult part of an offensive battle. He presented calculations of the necessary density of artillery fire and the necessary strength of infantry and tanks. He said, among other things, that a division could breach a 4-kilometre front successfully provided it was reinforced by two artillery regiments.

Maxim Antonyuk and the other generals who took the floor in the debate, made many pertinent points. A few of the critical observations were indeed quite caustic.

It was noted that offensive operations by rifle divisions should proceed in close co-operation with all arms. The objectives should be clear and vigorous thrusts should be mounted all along the depth of the enemy defences with

the purpose of dispersing, investing and destroying enemy forces.

In addition to discussions concerning operational art and strategy, we also held five briefings. Their purpose was to verify how well our generals had understood the basic principles of modern warfare, particularly in relation to offensive and defensive operations by armies and fronts. They also served the purpose of gauging the proficiency and ability of the top commanders.

A war game was played on maps, entitled "An Offensive Operation by a Front", to afford top commanders practice in organising and planning a front and army offensive operation, ensuring supplies and finalising the basic elements of a modern offensive operation. I was put in command of the 14th Army, which was part of the "eastern" side. The objective was to breach a deeply distributed defence and send mobile mechanised cavalry into the gap to exploit the success.

The game showed that many of the younger generals, only recently promoted to top posts, lacked experience in controlling major operational groups. However, by and large the commanders of fronts and armies coped with their assignments.

Next on the agenda of our assembly was an exhibition of new weapons and technology at training fields and tank testing grounds. This was edifying.

After the conference we had another bilateral strategic game from January 8 to 11, 1941, under the guidance of the People's Commissar for Defence.

Its purpose, among other things, was to study the rudiments of large-scale strategic operations, large-scale defensive operations and the probable war theatres, to afford practice to top commanders in assessing the situation and adopting decisions in difficult combat conditions, and to thrash out common views on the conduct of modern offensive operations with massive employment of artillery, tanks and aircraft.

I was put in command of the 25th Army of the "eastern" side.

The critique took place in the Kremlin on January 13, 1941, attended by members of the Politbureau and the government, the People's Commissar for Defence, the

Chief of the General Staff, deputies of the Defence Commissar, commanders of service arms and of military districts.

The critique was made by General of the Army Kirill Meretskov, Chief of the General Staff. Deplorably, it was patchy and somewhat confused. We took this failure close to heart and were distressed that Meretskov's report created an unfavourable impression on the members of the Politbureau. The following day Meretskov was relieved of his duties and Georgi Zhukov was appointed in his stead. This, it was said, was due to Meretskov's dismal report.

It had originally been planned to hold the critique a day later at the General Staff, not in the Kremlin. However, Stalin had phoned unexpectedly to the People's Commissar for Defence and changed the venue and time. This was the reason for Meretskov's failure, for the results of the war game had not yet been exhaustively examined, and, properly speaking, the summary of the games was not ready. No other general could have made an exhaustive critique of the intricate game at such short notice.

That the critique was held at summit level indicated that special importance was being attached to our assembly. I, for one, had never before attended that sort of conference.

Zhukov, who had been the commander of one of the sides, took the floor after Meretskov had made his report and gave an account of the troop operations. He was followed by Pavlov and others.

What impressed me most was General Yakov Fedorenko's speech. It dealt with the employment of armour in offensive operations. He appealed for closer attention to tanks. He said some of the Red Army tanks were obsolete and inferred the need for producing new T-34 and KV models without delay.

He said if no additional funds could be raised for this out of the budget, the allocations to other arms should be reallocated, and added that funds allocated for artillery could be safely reduced. At this point, he was curtly interrupted by Marshal Grigory Kulik. "Artillery will make scrap of your tanks," Kulik exclaimed. "It's a sheer waste making tanks."

Fedorenko attempted to calm his opponent. "Tanks," he retorted, "have guns as well and can compete with

the artillery in fire power. They have the advantage of mobility and armour. What is more, they also have machine guns. They are the best of all weapons in mobile warfare."

Kulik took the floor as soon as Fedorenko had finished. He spoke vehemently on behalf of his service arm. He asked for more funds for the artillery and spurned Fedorenko's suggestion of reallocating funds in favour of tanks.

Rychagov spoke about planes in modern offensive operations by fronts and armies and took the opportunity of pointing out to the government that industry was not doing enough to produce new models of aircraft, thus retarding the development of the air force.

Questions related to armaments and funds had not been officially put on the agenda of the Kremlin conference. The controversy on funds was obviously touched off by the unsatisfactory state of affairs. Meanwhile the imminence of a war was all too distinctly felt. Commanders of the service arms were conscious of their responsibility in equipping and arming the troops. There were too many unsettled problems in this respect, and the generals took advantage of the Kremlin conference to tell the government of their needs. I think they were perfectly right to do so.

Stalin took the floor. Evidently, he wished to reconcile the opponents. He said the Soviet Armed Forces were developing harmoniously and that definite proportions were being maintained between the various arms. He added that these proportions had attained the desired level and that talk about funds was a waste of time, because the allocations to the various arms corresponded to the fixed proportions and the harmonious development of the armed forces.

Nothing more was said on the subject after Stalin's statement, for his judgement was final and everybody believed he was infallible.

A retrospective analysis shows clearly that Stalin had been wrong. What he meant by harmonious development was keeping all service arms at about the same level. However, of the existing services some were relatively old, such as the infantry, artillery and cavalry, and others were new, such as mechanised troops and the air force. Victory

naturally depended on a skillful co-ordination of all the arms, but the role of each was different, and their condition at the time was different too.

The weight in warfare of armoured troops and planes had increased substantially. It was inconceivable that victory in a mobile war could be attained without them, or even if they were poorly developed. It was obvious, therefore, that their development had to be speeded. We should also bear in mind that, being a relatively old arm with a glorious history and fine traditions, a conclusive theory of combat and control, artillery had already achieved a fairly high level. Undeniably, it too had to be developed and improved, but our armoured troops and the air force were still in the formative stage and called for close unflagging attention both as regards stockpiling new improved models of planes, tanks and self-propelled weapons, and as regards the theory of combat and control. It was obvious that tanks had to be given precedence. It was also essential to overcome the conservative element and impress the generals that tanks were an independent arm, rather than an adjunct to infantry. It may be argued that the fallacious attitude to mechanised troops had been lived down by that time. Unfortunately, the facts show the very reverse. When I went to the Far East shortly after the conference and took charge of the 1st Special Red Banner Army it had 10 tank brigades and no tank divisions, to say nothing of tank corps.

This shows that the principle of massing tanks was not yet fully appreciated as a crucial factor.

Generally speaking, many of us who had analysed tank employment in modern warfare doubted the usefulness of tank brigades. A brigade was intermediate between a tactical and operational unit. In fact, it was not properly suited for either the tactical or operational combat missions. Separate tank battalions attached to infantry divisions were better adapted for tactical purposes, while tank divisions incorporated in mechanised corps were far more desirable than brigades for operational purposes. If necessary, mechanised corps could be joined into an army. Indeed, this would be the right kind of concentration. Separate tank battalions could render direct support to the infantry. Tactical tanks could operate in infantry battle lines, helping

the infantry with their fire and tracks, and fortifying their morale.

Unfortunately, Stalin did not think it essential to go into such "trivialities", on which successful warfare and victory at a low cost in lives depended.

Stalin referred in his speech to the impending war, the possibility of two fronts—against nazi Germany in the west and imperialist Japan in the east—and suggested distributing our top military personnel accordingly. He did not name the probable time war was likely to break out and spoke of the coming war as a war of manoeuvre. This, he said, called for a revision of the tables of organisation of our infantry divisions. The infantry divisions, he said, ought to be streamlined and made more mobile. He suggested reducing their numerical strength and logistic unit so these would not detain the troops and impair their mobility. He spoke at length about the future war as a war of huge armies and stressed that we had to maintain a two- or three-to-one numerical edge over our probable enemy.

Stalin stressed that a modern motorised army amply equipped with automatic and other weapons needed a continuous well-organised flow of supplies. The troop rear and the rear in the broad sense were of the utmost importance, he said, because food, ammunition, arms and equipment had to stream in constantly to the front lines from all parts of the country. He said a stock of food had to be built up and described as wise the one-time decision of the tsarist government to stockpile dried bread. He referred to dried bread as a good, valuable food. It was light in weight and could be preserved over a long period. "Tea and hard tacks," he said unsmilingly, "are not so bad."

A reshuffle of top commanders followed the Kremlin conference. General M. Kirponos, who was in command of the Leningrad Military District, was put in charge of the Special Kiev Military District, while General Popov, who headed the 1st Special Red Banner Army, was put at the head of the Leningrad Military District. I, who had only just assumed command of the North Caucasian Military District, was appointed Commander of the 1st Special Red Banner Army stationed in the Far East, while General Ivan Konev, Commander of the Transbaikalian Military District, was made Commander of the North Caucasian Military

District. There were other reshuffles, which pursued the purpose of distributing top personnel for a possible war on two fronts.

What conclusions does this set of measures prompt?

The conference had been of distinct benefit to the body of generals. They acquired considerable fresh information and gained some practical experience. The top army commanders had had an opportunity to get acquainted with each other, and the top men of the People's Commissariat for Defence and General Staff, too, got to know the various generals directly subordinated to them and to judge their qualifications and abilities.

The questions raised at the conference were highly pertinent and urgent. Their proper solution extended the scope of the Soviet generals, impregnated their views and promoted the proper organisation of defence.

Like the 1935 manoeuvres, the conference did me a lot of good and extended my operational outlook. The fundamental aspects of military strategy, the operational art and tactics that crystallised in my mind at the conference guided me in wartime, though I had to modify them to suit the specific combat situation. Here are the main conclusions I wrote down in my notebook after the conference:

1. War is creeping up on us. Nowadays, it is never declared beforehand, and opens with a sudden attack. This is why our armies have to be kept at wartime or near wartime strength. All units in the frontier areas ought to be at full strength and always alerted for combat.

2. The strategic purpose in a modern war is not attained by one, but rather by a series of consecutive frontal operations along a big frontage by means of a deep breach and ample operational and strategic reserves.

The main type of a modern offensive operation is a breakthrough crowned by encirclement and a total rout of the enemy. The best thing is to organise simultaneous thrusts at several points (sectors).

3. In a modern war troops have to be highly mobile and highly manoeuvrable in the battle field. This applies not only to tactical units, but also to large operational formations, armies included. For this reason their organisational structure and composition has got to be revised. Logistical

units and officers and the non-combat detachments that tend to weigh down armies, corps and divisions, ought to be considerably reduced.

4. Double or triple superiority in numbers and equipment, and ample reserves are essential for an operation to succeed.

After five or six days of offensive fighting the mobile force of the first echelon has to be relieved. This means the Front needs replacements in sufficient numbers to meet the requirements of a 15- or 20-day (maybe even longer) offensive operation.

5. Now that engineering has made spectacular progress and the army is getting new fighting machines all the time, we should lay the accent on whirlwind operations. An army that advances 10 kilometres in 24 hours cannot be successful. Those who refuse to motorise are outdated and will fail the military test; they will go under.

6. Local operations are possible, even necessary, provided the enemy is heavily outnumbered and success is certain. Otherwise, a local operation will only squander strength.

7. The tactical air force will be highly important in the coming war. Victory in battle will depend largely on short-range bombers and attack planes, which must co-operate with the ground forces. Long-range bombers are suited for acts of diversion in deep army and front operations, and for specific missions far in the enemy rear. This makes it doubly important to co-ordinate air and ground operations.

8. Material and technical equipment is of the utmost importance in modern conditions. The flow of various supplies to the front lines is immense. Hence the need for reducing non-combat units to the minimum and securing efficient logistics. Delays or breakdowns in the flow of supplies, no matter how short, will be costly to the troops, perhaps even disastrous. Concentrated foods have to be stockpiled more effectively. The troops must have enough concentrated foods for five and enough fresh products for two days.

The December conference revealed many deficiencies in the development of the Soviet Armed Forces and their war preparedness.

Activation of new units and equipment of the Red Army proceeded according to plan. But not quickly enough, especially in the case of the mechanised troops and the air force. As a matter of fact, none of our mechanised corps was built up to full strength. The 3rd Mechanised Corps, of which I was in command, had half the requisite number of tanks, which were chiefly old T-26 models. The new T-34 and KV tanks were still lamentably few.

The same was true of the air force. Splendid new models had been designed, such as the Yak-1, Mig-3, Lagg-3, etc., but the aviation industry had only just started to build them in mass.

Many important aspects of the country's defence were neglected; particularly the disposition of troops in the western frontier area. Frontier defences running more than 3,000 km from the Barents to the Black Sea were manned by the troops of five military districts—Leningrad, Baltic, Special Western, Special Kiev and Odessa. Some of them consisted of two, others of three, armies. The Kiev Military District was the only one with four armies, but it covered a frontage of 800 kilometres.

There was nothing wrong about a frontier area's forces having to cover so much of the border in peace time. But with a war looming large, a more effective disposition of strength should have been envisaged, based on the war plan and the pertinent strategic objectives. Yet no such plan existed. It may appear that a country pursuing peace need not have framed a plan of war. After all, the very idea of war was contrary to its peaceful aspirations. But this, I think, was an immature view to take. A war plan need not necessarily be aggressive. It may be a plan of defence following a line of active offensive warfare in the event of a military attack. The war plan should take account of numerous factors, including the political and strategic war objectives (at least for the initial stage), and specify the disposition of troops and the time schedule for combat readiness and engagement.

Stalin explained that our setbacks in the early stage were due to peace-loving nations like ours being always slower to prepare for war than aggressive ones. I do not think this accords with the Marxist-Leninist view, for it would mean that peaceful nations are destined to suffer

heavy losses and setbacks in the beginning of a war, to come abreast of the aggressor at the height of the war, and finally surpass him in later stages. That sort of approach gives the aggressor hopes of victory, while dooming the peace-loving peoples to inactivity in the matter of repulsing aggression. It was a wrong view to take, particularly for the Soviet Union, which had every objective chance to inflict a crushing defeat on the enemy at the very beginning of the war. What we witnessed was not an objective military lag on the part of a peace-loving state, but the effect of subjective mistakes made by Stalin.

The problem of war and peace is the gravest the higher government bodies have to deal with, for it is tied up with the basic interests of the nation, the preservation or loss of national independence and social gains. Delay in preparing a country for defence and in estimating the time of the probable outbreak of war is absolutely intolerable, for it leads to a tremendous loss of life and property, and loss of strategic initiative to boot. So long as the possibility of war exists, a country must always be prepared for it. The time factor is highly pertinent, sometimes even crucial, in defence preparations.

If Stalin as the actual head of state had taken an effective decision two or three years before the war, spelling out the schedule of troop readiness, the chief strategic objectives and the dispositioning of the armed forces, things would have taken an entirely different course when the war finally broke out. We had ample strength. Quite enough strength, as a matter of fact, not only to block the enemy offensive, but also to inflict a crushing defeat on the nazis by means of counter-blows and a counter-offensive.

One more thing. We did not take due account of the methods of warfare the nazis used in the West. Though the Soviet-German non-aggression pact existed, Hitler Germany was still a menace to the Soviet Union. It was an aggressive state, led by men who would stoop to the foulest breach of faith if it suited their purpose. This was something Stalin disregarded.

It was clear by the end of 1940 that the nazi command with its blitzkrieg doctrine followed a rigid plan, that of knocking powerful panzer wedges into the enemy's lines,

while the Luftwaffe pounded troops and communications. In the wake of the panzer wedges swarmed the infantry.

If this had been duly considered, the troops would have been deployed somewhat differently at the start of the war. The artillery, air force and other means of combat should have been so dispositioned as to be able to engage the enemy at short notice and to stand their ground.

This oversight was largely due to the fact that the experienced body of commanders had been massacred in the Stalin cult purges, while the commanders that took their places, both in Moscow and in the various military districts, lacked sufficient experience.

Some of the general ideas of the Soviet military doctrine, though essentially correct, could not be carried into effect in the initial stage of the war due to the above-mentioned flaws in our defence preparations.

It is not too much to say that the tremendous efforts of the Soviet people and the guidance of the Communist Party had made the Soviet Union and its army potentially stronger than Hitler Germany in all respects by the time the war broke out. It was due entirely to faulty leadership during the Stalin cult and errors on the part of the People's Commissariat for Defence and the General Staff that the Red Army was inferior to the Wehrmacht in the crucial sectors as regards armaments and, partially, combat preparedness. The Soviet Armed Forces were far superior in the moral sense, but that, of course, was insufficient for victory.

As I said earlier, I was appointed Commander of the North Caucasian Military District shortly before the conference, and reappointed Commander of the 1st Special Red Banner Army in the Far East a month later, two days before the conference ended. I had to leave at once for my new post. The new command was unquestionably more responsible, because the 1st Special Red Banner Army was superior to the North Caucasian Military District in strength and, as the People's Commissar warned me, had to be ready for expansion into a Front.

On January 15, 1941, I was received by Semyon Timoshenko, then People's Commissar for Defence, and a few days later, having quickly wound up my affairs in Moscow, I set out for the Far East. I reached my destination on

February 4, 1941. The reports of the Chief of Staff, and those of the chiefs of arms and services, coupled with my personal observations, laid bare many deficiencies in the state of affairs. The previous Commander, General Mar-
kian Popov, a capable soldier and a splendid man, had been unable to eliminate all the flaws in the short time he was in command of the 1st Special Army.

I gave all my time to preparing and training troops, and improving combat efficiency.

The days passed in cares about the disposition of units and the due standard of combat training. Yet grave developments were in the offing.

On June 14 the press carried a TASS communication, saying, "Germany is observing the terms of the Soviet German non-aggression pact just as faithfully as the Soviet Union, for which reason . . . rumours about Germany's intentions to tear up the pact and attack the U.S.S.R. are entirely groundless. The deployment of German troops relieved from operations in the Balkans to the eastern and north-eastern parts of Germany are presumably prompted by motives that have no bearing on Soviet-German relations."* The communication also said the Soviet Union was adhering rigidly to the terms of its treaty with Germany.

This sort of pronouncement regarding nazi Germany did a lot to prejudice Soviet preparedness when, a mere week later, Hitler started his war against the U.S.S.R.

On June 19, I received a telegram from People's Commissar Timoshenko, ordering me to turn the army over to General Shelakhov, the Chief of Staff, and to come to Moscow. By mid-day on June 21, I had signed the pertinent order and held a conference with the officers at Army Headquarters, where I reviewed the work accomplished in the preceding four and a half months.

Once again I had to part with people I had grown fond of, people I had learned to appreciate.

I had no idea what awaited me a few days later.

Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, was yet another in the chain of crimes committed by German fascism against humanity. Prior to venturing on

the treacherous attack on the U.S.S.R. German monopoly capital and its faithful protégé, Adolf Hitler, had accumulated considerable experience in international piracy. Continental Europe from the Apennines in the south to Norway's Arctic fjords in the north and from the Bay of Biscay in the west to war-ravaged Poland in the east, languished under the "new order".

A copious number of investigations has been published about the early period of the Second World War. So there is hardly any point in dealing at length with the rise of the nazi Reich and the international relations of that time. It was a gloomy chapter in the history of the European nations overrun by nazi aggressors. Today, we know full well the reason why Germany, crushed in the First World War, was able to re-emerge as a military force and bring its near and far neighbours to their knees. Clearly, the criminal policy of certain U.S., British and French quarters was the main reason for it. Their blind hatred of communism spurred them to suckle the nazis, to put a sword into their hands, oblivious of the fact that it would ultimately be turned against them. It was due to their efforts to "channel" nazi aggression against the U.S.S.R. that all Europe was trampled by the Wehrmacht boot. They rejected the principle of collective security out of hand and spurned all Soviet proposals for joint action, enabling Hitler to crush his victims one by one.

I have no intention of delving here into the political reasons for Hitler's early successes. However, I should like to say a few words about the reasons why the essentially ineffective blitzkrieg doctrine had been so surprisingly effective in the nazi war against Poland and France.

In the case of Poland, nazi numerical superiority was, of course, the prime factor. Hitler put 57 divisions, including 10 panzer and motorised divisions, into the field against Poland's 30 infantry divisions, 11 cavalry brigades and two armoured brigades. This meant that Germany had an overall two-to-one advantage, with 4- to 5-fold superiority along the main routes of the nazi offensive. Besides, Hitler flung two air fleets against the Poles.

It stands to reason that the Polish army, abandoned to its fate by its Western allies, had no chance of winning the war without outside assistance. All the same, with the

given relation of strength, it could have resisted far longer than it did, considering the splendid morale and fighting efficiency of the Polish soldier. There was more than one reason why the Poles were so quickly defeated. One of them was that the Polish High Command made the disastrous mistake of spreading its troops thinly along the entire western frontier instead of massing shock groups in the depth of the country at the more important strategic sectors to block the wedge-like nazi thrusts and avoid investment and quick defeat. This, so to speak, was the fatal error of the Polish Command. There was also a succession of errors made by the Polish Government and General Staff in the pre-war years. The Poles, who were under strong French influence, had a totally wrong conception of the future war. They thought it would be positional and did little or nothing to bring their arms up to date, to build up their tank and mechanised troops, and certainly nothing at all about massing them.

France's case was more tragic, because France, considering Britain's assistance, was a match for the Wehrmacht in strength and technology. The French military leadership was disastrously mistaken about the character of the then impending war. There is no excuse for it, because the French were aware of the nazi command building up tank troops and concentrating armour, and it was doubly criminal after they saw Germany swamping Poland. The trust they put in the Maginot Line was another criminal error, as was their hope that the new war would be one of position like the previous one.

Positional warfare consists essentially of passive forms and methods, rather than active operations. Its main accent is on defence, and it abandons initiative to the enemy. The French General Staff failed to realise that the type of combat employed in the First World War had gone off the stage never to return. The main mistake of the French was that they adopted a defensive doctrine. That is one of the reasons why French arms, and Polish arms too, were so quickly defeated. True, the French Command thought its doctrine flexible, for it conceived offensive, as well as defensive, actions. It assumed that in the early stage of the war heavy casualties would be inflicted on the enemy in defensive battles along the fortified sections of the

frontier, and that France would then assume the counter-offensive and crush a heavily bled adversary.

This scheme of things may have appeared logical at first glance, but was really incorrigibly false. To begin with, it was wrong to expect the enemy to operate as the French would wish and, secondly, it was wrong to ignore the operational possibilities of tanks, the new type of weapon, in large-scale manoeuvres, concentrated thrusts and deep penetrations.

The French did not appreciate the fact that massive use of tanks altered the nature of combat most radically. They were sold on the outdated notions of the First World War. They had a large number of tanks, but turned them into an adjunct of the infantry. Only one of the 90 divisions the French had when the war began was an armoured division. Neither did they reckon with the air force, which had developed into a powerful arm, and with the development of artillery. In brief, they overlooked all the factors that had radically changed the nature of war, turning it from positional into a war of manoeuvre. The French army had had enough tanks for large scale armoured commands, to say nothing of tank corps and divisions.

To sum up, from the military point of view the main reason for France's defeat was its antiquated and essentially fallacious military doctrine.

France's sad experience shows that numerical strength and technology are not the only crucial factors in a country's defence. The composition of the troops, the accent on new weapons, the development of new methods of warfare with an eye on the changing nature of war are not a bit less crucial.

The Wehrmacht victories in the West complicated the international situation at the time of Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. They augmented nazi strength and reinforced nazi economic resources. Besides, the ease with which these victories were achieved redoubled Hitler's confidence in the blitzkrieg doctrine and, hence, in the possibility of smashing the Soviet Union in the same easy fashion.

CHAPTER TWO

THE OUTBREAK

On Sunday June 22, the day of my departure to Moscow, when it was already mid-day in the Far East and still early dawn in the European part of the country, I received a phone call from Lt.-Gen. Ivan Smorodinov, Chief of Staff of the Far Eastern Front. He dispensed with the usual greeting, and told me with suppressed emotion: "We have just received a report from the General Staff. At 4 a.m. Moscow time the Germans crossed the border and began bombing our cities. The war has begun!"

Frankly, I was too stunned to say anything. Then, after recovering my senses, I asked him:

"Why did Front Headquarters withhold information about the war being imminent from army commanders?"

"Because there was no such information," came the curt reply.

I shuddered. This meant that the nazi assault had caught us unawares.

A professional soldier. I had known all along, as clearly as all our other soldiers and most Soviet people, that war with nazi Germany, the shock force of imperialism, was distinctly probable. But I had never thought I would learn about the war breaking out after it had begun. Since I did not know the reason for this tragic development, I blamed it on poor intelligence along our western frontiers. After Smorodinov's call, I began wondering why I was being transferred from the Far East, since he told me the People's Commissar for Defence had ordered an emergency conference and had instructed local commanders to alert the troops. "This means," I thought to myself, "that there is a chance of a sudden attack by the Japanese

militarists." As we know now, the attack did not come off for a number of reasons, but at that time it appeared more than likely.

All the same, I was glad I would do my fighting in the West. I knew the Western war theatre and the German army. What I did not know was the assignment I would be getting in Moscow.

A long train journey lay ahead. I boarded the train a few hours after my conversation with Smorodinov. The five days and nights of the journey to Novosibirsk were probably the most agonising in my life. My enforced idleness at a time when my country was living through the most harrowing days of its history, was unbearably hard to suffer.

I was deep in thought all those days and nights in the train compartment, reappraising all the more important junctions in my life. I knew the Communist Party and my people had made me, a village lad from a widow's unhappy family, what I was, and I knew the hour had struck to acquaint myself. The milestones in my life rose before me. I remembered the early battles against the Germans in 1914 with the 168th Mirgorod Infantry Regiment. The platoon commander had been killed and Corporal Eremenko was temporarily placed in command. I remember clearly how the platoon went over the top under my command at 9 o'clock in the morning on receipt of a prearranged signal. At first we strode forward. Then we broke into a run. The bullets whined around us and shells screeched overhead. Cheering, the platoon soon reached an enemy trench. Hand-to-hand fighting ensued. It was a horrible sight to watch people sticking bayonets into each other. I cannot tell now how many Germans I killed. It may have been one and it may have been a dozen. The commander has to be a model for his men, and I was eager to live up to this postulate. Russians have always excelled in the bayonet assault. We always won at close quarters. But I had bad luck. In the third enemy trench I was hit at point-blank range. The bullet grazed the lung.

This attack, on August 31, 1914, is impregnated in my memory. On leaving the field hospital I returned to the battle lines. There were offensive battles, and then the siege of Peremyshl, followed by years of warfare in the

Carpathians. I was in the mounted reconnaissance on the Rumanian front. My combat experience grew and so did my hatred of those who had engineered the senseless slaughter.

Came the February Revolution and hopes of an early end to the war. The soldiers elected deputies to regimental committees. My mounted reconnaissance troop elected me.

The Great October Socialist Revolution drew the line that ended an unhappy existence and ushered in a life of dignity for every man. The regimental committees carried through many important measures. Together with soldiers like myself, with people of working-class and peasant origin, I tackled matters of state, handling questions that would at last attach dignity to the lower ranks and help them return home to peaceful occupations.

We were on Rumanian territory at the time and the local authorities railed at our wish of going home. They tried to disarm and intern us. The regimental committee embarked on unsuccessful negotiations with the Rumanian authorities. When our patience wore thin, the committee undertook the functions of command and led our troops across the Dniester, fighting every inch of the way.

When the Germans launched their offensive in the Ukraine in the spring of 1918, after the Central Rada betrayed the country. I was at home in the Lugansk region. With other ex-soldiers, some of whom had joined the Communist Party, I managed to form a partisan unit, which soon grew to 350 men. We caused a lot of trouble to the German invaders. This was when I received my first impression of the beastly image of German militarism.

At the end of 1918 our unit was incorporated into the regular Red Army. My service in the Soviet Armed Forces began. Conscious of my kinship with the Bolsheviks, I joined the Communist Party in December 1918.

Then came the Civil War. I was with the Red cavalry, fighting in the south at first, then against landlord Poland, then against Wrangel and, lastly, against the bandit Makhno troops. The unit I was in was the legendary 14th Cavalry Division commanded by Alexander Parkhomenko. It became clear to me we would have to be on our toes so long as imperialism existed on earth. I realised that war-craft and people versed in the art of war would be needed

by our socialist country for a long time to come. It was not easy for me, with merely a parish school education and training at a tsarist army school, to be chief of brigade reconnaissance, then chief of regimental headquarters, then field assistant of the regimental commander, then chief of brigade headquarters, and then a regimental commander.

As the train rolled on and on, I remembered the various battles of the Civil War— the fighting at Voronezh and Rostov, in the Kuban River basin, on the Polish front and in the Crimea.

Whether I liked it or not, my recollections dragged me out of the familiar peaceful pattern into a combat environment filled with dynamism, sudden change, tension and the need to act coolly and firmly. It was as if I was testing myself, seeing if my attributes of a soldier and general had not been blunted. My heart bled at the thought of the horrors of modern warfare, of the ordeal and grief my people would have to suffer.

My training at the Higher Cavalry School and at two military academies, and my background as chief of mounted reconnaissance and, ultimately, as commander of an army, enabled me to visualise distinctly how hard it would be to win a war that had burst upon us suddenly in highly unpropitious circumstances.

All the time, I had the feeling that the train was travelling too slowly. I wished I could be in the battlefield where the future of my country hung in the balance and on arriving in Novosibirsk, as if in response to my fervent wish, I was handed an order of the People's Commissar to abandon the train and take a plane to Moscow.

So I continued my journey from Novosibirsk by air. On June 28, I reported directly from the airfield to the People's Commissariat for Defence and was received by Marshal Semyon Timoshenko.

From the People's Commissar's brief review of the situation I gathered that the state of affairs was graver than I had thought. Timoshenko blamed the setbacks chiefly on the frontier commanders, who, he said, had fallen down on their jobs. Indeed, this was partly true.

I could hardly believe my eyes when Timoshenko showed me on the map how much territory we had already lost.

The Marshal referred scornfully to the Commander of the Western Front, General of the Army Dmitry Pavlov, and expressed strong apprehensions about the fate of the troops in his charge.

"Now you know the state of affairs," he concluded.

"It's a sad state," I replied.

After a pause, Timoshenko continued:

"General Pavlov and his Chief of Staff have been removed. The government has decided to appoint you Commander of the Western Front and Lt. Gen. Herman Malandin as your Chief of Staff. Both of you are to assume command at once."

"What is the specific assignment?" I asked.

"To stop the enemy advance," the People's Commissar replied.

Timoshenko wasted no time in handing me the written order of my appointment to the new command. On the night of June 28 Malandin and I left for Mogilev, where Front Headquarters were located in a near-by forest. I was very glad Herman Malandin, whom I knew to be an experienced general with extraordinary operational ability, was my Chief of Staff.

Before I go on to describe our arrival at the C.P. of the Western Front, I should like to make a brief survey of the first few days of the war. This will give a better idea of subsequent developments.

Let us analyse the fighting along the Soviet German front in the days that followed the Nazi assault.

Before the attack, Hitler had concentrated along our border 190 divisions, of which 152 were German, 18 Finnish, 18 Rumanian and 2 Hungarian. This huge ground force had the support of 5,000 planes.

The Soviet western frontier districts--Leningrad, Baltic, Western and Kiev--were reorganised in the early stage of the war into the Northern, North-Western, Western and South-Western fronts. Besides, a Southern Front was newly established. The reorganisation amounted to nothing more than a change of names. Nothing else changed, because the fronts were not yet at full strength, not yet concentrated and not yet readied for combat. Hence, they were unable to render the rapidly advancing enemy any effective resistance.

The enemy task forces, particularly the nazi mobile commands, outnumbered us heavily in the sectors of the main drive and crashed through the hastily deployed combat orders of the Red Army easily enough, driving deeper and deeper into the country.

Communications between commanders and troops were disrupted time and again in the continuously changing situation, which naturally complicated control. Here and there control collapsed altogether.

The Luftwaffe did untold damage to us. It battered us in depth, demolishing strategic objectives and destroying arms and personnel.

The cumulative effect was that nazi superiority grew still more pronounced. In the first week of the war the enemy captured considerable sections of the Baltic area, of the Ukraine and of Byelorussia. The most dangerous thrusts were in the western and north-western directions, for they were ultimately aimed at Moscow and Leningrad.

Looking back over the years one becomes strongly conscious of the need to study and assess this bitter experience in order to prevent history from repeating itself.

The Red Army lacked the necessary experience. The mobilisation was not completed. Our new western frontiers were not sufficiently fortified and the frontier area, which had become a war theatre, had not been prepared for action. In addition I could list a few other direct causes of our early setbacks. They were due to our overconfidence in the strength of the Red Army and to our belief that the nazis would not dare to attack the Soviet Union.

It was generally assumed that by concluding the non-aggression pact with Germany we had put the war off for a considerable time. To be sure, the benefits of the pact were indisputable. It did indeed delay the war. Yet it was clear a clash was inevitable, and clear, too, that it would occur quite soon.

The nazi assault, however, came as a complete surprise for the Soviet border troops. In whirlwind fashion the enemy inflicted heavy losses and captured immense areas. The most tragic thing was that the troops stationed along the Western frontier were the best trained, the finest we had at the time.

There have been lively discussions on exactly how sudden the nazi attack had been. It is my belief that it came as a complete surprise for the Red Army and the commanders of military districts, since the army had not been alerted for combat.* As a result, the nazi army seized the initiative, gained a definite military advantage and compelled the Soviet troops to retreat.

Hitler's General Staff expected to end the war against the Soviet Union in quick time. The Barbarossa Plan provided for simultaneous thrusts in three main directions.

The first thrust was mounted from Eastern Prussia against Pskov and Leningrad by Army Group North, consisting of the 16th and 18th field armies and the 4th Panzer Group, supported by the 1st Air Fleet.

The second thrust was initiated from around Warsaw against Minsk, Smolensk and, ultimately, Moscow by Army Group Centre, consisting of the 4th and 9th field armies and the 3rd and 2nd panzer groups, supported by the 2nd Air Fleet. This, by the way, was the principal force.

The third thrust was touched off from around Lublin towards Zhitomir, Kiev and the Donets Basin by Army Group South, consisting of the 6th, 17th and 11th field armies and the 1st Panzer Group, supported by the 4th Air Fleet.

Army Group North had the support of the Finnish Army and Army Group South that of the Hungarian and Rumanian forces. Besides, a German army under the code name of Norway was deployed on the extreme northern flank of the German strategic front with orders to capture the northern ports on the Barents Sea and seize the Kirov Railway.

Fairly strong Soviet cover forces were stationed to the right and left of the Bielostok-Lomzha line. This area, protruding like a blunt wedge far westward, deprived the enemy groups heading for Leningrad and the Ukraine of direct contact and imperilled their flanks and rear. Conscious of the immense strategic value of the Bielostok area for their subsequent assault, the nazis massed a strong

* The contentions, and that of Kurt von Tippelskirch among them, that an order alerting our troops was issued in April 1941 are contrary to the facts.

force against it. They planned two thrusts in convergent directions to cut off and invest the Soviet troops in Byelorussia. This would open the road north for their panzers, which were to crush the Soviet troops on the Baltic coast and capture Leningrad (jointly with Army Group North).

After this major assignment would be fulfilled, the Nazi command intended to mount offensive operations aimed at capturing Moscow.

Army Group Centre under Fieldmarshal Fedor von Bock, which consisted of 50 divisions, including 15 panzer and motorised divisions, was to invest and wipe out the Soviet forces in Byelorussia. A large artillery force, a strong force of engineers and other special units were attached to the Army Group.

By the evening of June 21 all these troops had been deployed along our frontier between Suvalki and Brest. Concentrating this immense force had taken a long time. Troops were shipped to the Soviet border by train between February and June 1941.

Documents published after the war reveal that Army Group Centre was dispositioned as follows:

General Hermann Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group and General Strauss's 9th Army were massed in the so called Suvalki bulge and in the sector from Avgustov to Ostrolenka (270 kilometres), and General Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group and Günther von Kluge's 4th Army were massed south-east along the Western Bug up to Vlodava (280 kilometres). Both groups were to strike out simultaneously, the one at Suvalki Minsk and the other at Brest-Baranovichi.

The German General Staff had a clear cut plan for the offensive in Byelorussia. The 3rd Panzer Group in co-operation with the 9th Field Army was to drive through our defences north east of Suvalki and advance via Vilnius on Minsk. Part of the 9th Army was to move on the heels of the 3rd Panzer Group to mop up and consolidate the occupied area, while the rest of it was to advance in the general direction of Grodno, slicing up and destroying the encircled Soviet troops. The 2nd Panzer Group, which also had infantry support, would meanwhile overwhelm the fortified frontier line north-west and south of Brest, and subsequently advance in the general direction of Barano-

vichi and Minsk in order to seal the ring with the 3rd Panzer Group at Minsk. All Soviet troops in Byelorussia would then be completely invested.

At the same time, the 3rd Panzer Group would strike at Bielostok and thus, helped by the 9th Army, "cut off" the Bielostok bulge.

From Minsk, the nazis meant to advance on Smolensk, forcing the Berezina, the Western Dvina and the Dnieper on the move. The 3rd Panzer Group and the 9th Field Army were to lunge in the north-eastern direction and capture the Polotsk Vitebsk area, while the 2nd Panzer Group and the 4th Field Army were to advance directly on Smolensk.

After capturing Smolensk the 3rd Panzer Group was to join Army Group North for action against Leningrad.

Troops of the Soviet Western Special Military District under the command of General of the Army Dmitry Pavlov were assigned to cover the mobilisation and the shipment of troops to the western regions of Byelorussia. The mission was entrusted to the 3rd, 10th and 4th armies. Infantry constituted the first echelon, and the mechanised corps the second. Infantry divisions were dispositioned along the frontier from Koptsovo to Vlodava (450 kilometres) in order to screen the Minsk and Bobruisk sectors, with the District's air arm providing air cover for the ground troops.

When the nazi assault occurred, however, the Soviet troops were stationed at garrisons and summer camps 50 to 200 kilometres from the border. The frontier was covered by border guards. At many points, engineers, helped by other units, were still building frontier fortifications.

Shortly before the war, the troops of the District had begun receiving new weapons, and training was underway to learn to handle them. Mechanised and tank units were only just being formed. To speed the organisation of mechanised corps, tank brigades, separate battalions, cavalry and other units were being expanded to corps size. At first, all the mechanised corps had were the arms of the tank brigades and battalions. New tanks, the KV and T-34, had begun to dribble in since 1940, but there were still very few of them when the war broke out.

Some units had received new arms shortly before the

war and had not, naturally, had time to learn to use them. We had a substantial number of tanks when the war broke out, although there were not enough of them to fully arm our mechanised corps. Besides, many of the tanks were antiquated (T-26, BT-5, BT-7, etc.).

The air force too, had received new machines only shortly before the war. Air units consisting of I-16, I-15, and L-153 fighters and SB or DB-3 bombers were getting Mig-3, Lagg-3 and Yak-1 fighters, Pe-2 bombers and Il-2 attack aircraft to replace them.

The enemy troops advancing within the zone of the Western Front outnumbered the Soviet troops there 2-to-1, and 4-to-1 at points where they mounted their main assaults, particularly in the Brest-Baranovichi direction.

At 4 a.m. on June 22 the enemy opened hostilities in the western sector with an artillery bombardment of the Soviet frontier. The bombardment lasted between 1 and 2 hours. In the meanwhile, the Luftwaffe raided Grodno, Lida, Bielostok, Volkovysk, Baranovichi, Bobruisk, Brest, Pinsk and other towns up to 300 kilometres within the border.

The troops in the frontier area, for whom the outbreak of war came as a complete surprise, engaged the enemy in scattered groups, suffering tremendous losses, particularly in property. The initiative was in enemy hands from the word go.

There is a rather revealing passage to this effect in Guderian's book, *Reminiscences of a Soldier*. Here is what he writes:

"On June 20 and 21, I inspected the forward positions of my corps to see if preparations were completed. Thorough observation of the Russians convinced me that they knew nothing of our intentions. In the yard of the Brest Fortress, which we overlooked from our observation post, units drilled to the tune of parade music. . . . The outlook for success as regards the surprise factor was therefore good, and the question arose whether an hour's artillery bombardment envisaged in our plans was at all necessary in these circumstances."*

* Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, Heidelberg, 1951. S. 139.

The documents and papers in our own archives testify to the same thing.

On the first day enemy panzer units penetrated at a number of points from 50 to 60 kilometres within the border. Communications between the various headquarters and the troops were paralysed. Control of units became complicated. The commands on the flanks of the Western Front were in a dire plight.

The 3rd Army under Lt.-Gen. Vasily Kuznetsov had been by-passed by the enemy's 3rd Panzer Group on the right. The Soviet 56th Infantry Division, which defended a 40 kilometre sector, happened to be in the path of three German divisions. It abandoned Grodno and rolled back south-eastward. On the second day of the war it was fighting the enemy north of the Niemen. The two neighbouring divisions, the 87th and 27th, had also withdrawn and dug in south and south-west of Grodno.

Due to the withdrawal of the 3rd Army a gap of more than 100 kilometres developed between the flanks of the North-Western and Western fronts, through which the enemy advanced 120 km in a matter of 48 hours.

The state of affairs on the left flank of the Western Front, held by the 4th Army under Mj.-Gen. Alexander Korobkov, was just as bad. The 4th was assaulted by the 2nd Panzer Group and one of the corps of the enemy 4th Field Army. Four divisions of the Soviet 4th Army (the 6th, 42nd, 49th and 75th) stood in the path of the nazi offensive. Under the pressure of numerically superior enemy forces whose first echelon consisted of 10 divisions, four of them panzer divisions (with 6 divisions in the second echelon), the Red Army units began a withdrawal.

General Korobkov ordered Mj.-Gen. Stepan Oborin, Commander of the 14th Mechanised Corps, to mount a counter attack from Pruzhani and Kobrin. The counter-attack was abortive, because the divisions of the corps were stationed at long intervals and it had been impossible to concentrate them. So the 4th Army was compelled to withdraw across Yaselda River.

The Army Commander had not estimated enemy strength accurately enough and was therefore unable to take the necessary measures. Yet the terrain had been favourable

for defence and fortification. Despite the enemy's numerical superiority he could have been held up.

The retreat of the Soviet troops on the flanks of the Western Front put the forces in the centre, forming the Bielostok bulge, into a difficult position. This applied to Mj. Gen. Konstantin Golubev's 10th Army, which faced four enemy army corps—the 7th, 9th, 13th and 42nd.

The withdrawal of its neighbours, particularly of the 4th Army, made the situation of the 10th Army critical. Mj.-Gen. Pyotr Alhlyustin's mechanised corps stationed in Belsk tried to consolidate the line along Nuzhets River, but being hopelessly underequipped was compelled to retreat on June 23.

Troops on the right flank and in the centre of the Bielostok bulge rendered fierce resistance to the enemy, but the disastrous situation on the flanks made them roll back to positions on the Bobr River.

Acting on a directive of the People's Commissar for Defence, the Western Front Command decided in the evening of June 22 to strike at dawn of the following day with two mechanised and one cavalry corps from the Grodno area against the flank of an enemy force advancing from the Suvalki bulge.

The Soviet task force consisted of the 11th Mechanised Corps of the 3rd Army under Mj.-Gen. Dmitry Mostovenko, the 6th Mechanised Corps of the 10th Army under Mj.-Gen. Mikhail Khatskelevich and the 6th Cavalry Corps under Mj.-Gen. Ivan Nikitin. The task force was put under the overall command of Lt.-Gen. Ivan Boldin, Deputy Commander of the Western Front.

But to execute the flank thrust proved extremely difficult. None but the 11th Mechanised Corps was stationed in the initial assault area south of Grodno, while the HQ of the 6th Cavalry Corps was still in Bielostok and the divisions of the corps were stationed far apart, the 36th in and around Volkovyisk and the 6th at Lomzha.

The 11th Mechanised Corps was the only one to mount the assault at the prearranged time (June 23), while the rest of the troops were badly pounded by enemy air when they attempted to reach the assault positions, losing much of their fighting strength.

On the following day, June 24, the 11th Mechanised



I. S. Nikitin

Corps and those units of the 6th Mechanised Corps that had managed to reach the initial positions, hit the enemy south of Grodno with some success, pinning down 4 infantry divisions and holding up their advance on Lida for several days.

But the Soviet counter attack petered out by June 25. This was due to the almost total lack of air support and insufficient artillery, particularly anti aircraft artillery. The losses in men and property from the enemy shelling and air pounding were very great. On account of the ceaseless Nazi air raids supplies of ammunition and fuel bogged down.

The Moscow authorities, meanwhile, had no more than a hazy idea of the situation at the front. It was essential to remove the troops in the border area out of the range of the enemy assault to lines where a stiff defence could be organised, instead of flinging scattered units into a senseless counter-offensive.

In the circumstances, many Red Army units were trapped by the enemy and suffered immense losses in unequal combat. Some were entirely annihilated. Among these, was the 6th Cavalry Corps, which I had commanded at the time of the liberation campaign in Western Byelorussia. Today,

so many years later, I still cannot reconcile myself with the gallant cavalry corps being wiped out.

Many of our men were captured by the nazis. One of them was Mj. Gen. Ivan Nikitin, Commander of the 6th Cavalry Corps, a veteran officer who had been in charge of a cavalry regiment back in the Civil War days.

The nazis asked Nikitin to sign a paper that he had given himself up and that the German Command was treating him courteously. But despite brutal treatment, the Soviet general remained true to his country. In the POW camp at Hammelburg, Central Germany, Nikitin managed to organise a resistance group. On January 6, 1942, Nikitin and Gen. Alakhverdov, a close associate of his, were removed from the camp, and in April they were brutally executed in one of the Gestapo prisons, where they were kept for four months in stone cells chained to the wall.

After the war, survivors of the Hammelburg POW camp told the story of their courageous conduct.

The 3rd Panzer Group, which had captured Vilnius, advanced on Molodechno and, meeting little or no resistance, soon reached the Minsk fortified area.

The enemy owed this success partly to the decision of our Western Front Command to mount a counter-assault on Lida with troops dispositioned north-west of Minsk. It had been an unwise decision, quite contrary to the general situation of that hour.

Troop operations on our left wing, in the Baranovichi area, were also poorly organised. The 4th Army, badly bled by the enemy, was retreating eastward hastily. The Shara River presented a favourable line of defence, but the troops (some three divisions) in the area were scattered and acted on their own. Enemy panzer formations crossed the line easily and reached the Baranovichi area.

Despite the bravery of the Soviet troops and the tenacious resistance of most of the units, the initial frontier battle ended dismally for us.

The valour of the defenders of the Brest Fortress and of most of the soldiers killed in the early days of the war will remain imbedded for ever in the memory of the Soviet people.

In the first four days of its offensive, the nazi 3rd Panzer Group drove more than 200 kilometres into the Soviet

frontier area. It seized Vilnius. Then, meeting no organised resistance, it turned its main forces on Molodechno and Minsk, investing the divisions of the Western Front in the north and north-east. In the meantime, the 2nd Panzer Group, in co-operation with the nazi 4th Army, outflanked Soviet troops in the south and south-east, driving as much as 200 kilometres deep into Soviet territory.

After the 3rd Panzer Group turned on Minsk, enemy strength against the Western Front increased by another 12 divisions. Enemy superiority in arms, too, continued to increase, because we were suffering heavy losses from enemy shelling and air attacks.

All this made the situation extremely unfavourable for a more or less stable defence (to say nothing of a big counter-offensive), and for the withdrawal ordered at last by the Commander of the Western Front.

No more than a 50-kilometre escape corridor was left open towards Bielostok-Novogrudok. What was worse, there was no highway; besides, the enemy was very lively on both sides of the gateway.

The dire circumstances in which the withdrawal proceeded, with continuous rearguard and flank battles, can well be imagined. The poor roads ruled out the use of motor vehicles almost entirely. A large number of vehicles was lost due to a shortage of fuel. There was also a shortage of horses. Troops, retreating on foot, were continuously bombed and strafed from the air.

Each day the situation deteriorated. By the evening of June 25 motorised enemy units advancing northward reached the Volkovysk-Slonim road and cut off the most convenient and shortest route of withdrawal. In the meantime, enemy infantry (the 9th and 4th armies) threatened to split our troops west of Slonim.

The 10th Army barely coped with the task of covering its left flank from continuous enemy attacks in the south-west. It was also having great difficulties in holding the road along which Red Army troops were retreating to Bielostok-Volkovysk.

A fierce battle raged south-east of Volkovysk, where the enemy strained to cut off paths of retreat south-east through Ruzhani and east to Slonim and Baranovichi.

The Soviet 3rd Army, rolling back to Novogrudok, fought

every inch of the way against units of the nazi 8th Army Corps advancing through Lunny to Mosty in order to contact the 47th Panzer Corps of the 2nd Panzer Group.

On June 26 the fighting spread to the Minsk fortified area, defended by three Soviet corps (the 2nd and 44th Infantry Corps and the 20th Mechanised Corps) which formed the 13th Army under Lt.-Gen. Pyotr Filatov. They were assaulted by nazi panzer units of the 39th Panzer Corps of the 3rd Panzer Group.

On June 28, the day of my arrival in Moscow, the enemy closed the pocket round a number of 10th Army units at Bielostok, out of which most of them later managed to break out eastward.

On June 29 and 30 the situation grew still worse. The nazi 47th Corps crashed through to Minsk and made contact there with the 39th Panzer Corps. This meant that the enemy's 2nd and 3rd Panzer groups had joined forces. The Soviet 13th Army dispositioned in that area retreated, fighting on the march, to the Borisov-Smolevichi-Plich River line.

After the 2nd and 3rd Panzer groups made contact east of Minsk, the Soviet troops retreating from Grodno and Bielostok found themselves encircled. The troops fighting in the Minsk fortified area were also partially enveloped. The surrounded forces organised a stand in and around Nalibokskaya Pushcha, Novogrudok and Stoltbtsy.

After sealing the ring round the Soviet troops east of Minsk, the enemy developed his offensive eastward to the Dnieper.

In effect, we had no forces to oppose the enemy advance. We had practically no chance to erect a line of defence east of Minsk despite the favourable terrain, especially on the Berezina River. The enemy could reach the Berezina with impunity and then move on to the Dnieper, which was no more than 150 kilometres away. Fresh forces were being moved in from the rear to the Dnieper line, and it was likely the nazi would swarm all over them before they could be properly deployed.

This was the situation, a situation calling for drastic action in order to win time and organise defences along

the Western Dvina and the Dnieper, when Gen. Malandin and I arrived at the front.

At the end of that day, June 29, Gen. Franz Halder, Chief of the German General Staff, made the following entry in his diary concerning the situation of Army Group Centre:

"In Army Group Centre the situation continues to develop as anticipated. The Führer's worry that the armoured forces would overreach themselves in the advance has unfortunately prompted the commander of ground forces at a conference with Army Group Centre to refer to Bobruisk as nothing more important than the objective in a flank cover. Guderian, however, quite soundly from the operational point of view, is advancing on Bobruisk with two armoured divisions and is reconnoitering in the direction of the Dnieper; he certainly does that not just to cover the flank, but indeed in order to cross the Dnieper as soon as there is an opportunity to do so. Were he not to do that, he would be making a grave mistake. I hope that he will take the Dnieper bridges at Rogachov and Mogilev still today, which will open for him the road to Smolensk and from there on to Moscow. This is the only way right off to get around the dry gap between the Dnieper and the Dvina, now fortified by the Russians, and so block the way to Moscow for the enemy forces in the gap. Let us hope that the commanding generals of corps and armies will do the right thing."*

It was early morning when we arrived at the command post of the Western Front in a forest near Mogilev. The Commander was having breakfast in a small tent. I entered the tent, while General Malandin went to look for the Front Chief of Staff. General Pavlov greeted me quite effusively, as was his custom, showering me with numerous questions and exclamations:

"Why, it has been years since I saw you last! What on earth has brought you here? How long will you stay?"

Instead of replying, I handed him the order. He glanced at it, made no effort to conceal his confusion and alarm, and asked:

"What about me?"

* Franz Halder, *Diary*, Vol. 6 ("The Campaign in Russia"), p. 182.

"The People's Commissar instructs you to go to Moscow," I replied.

Pavlov invited me to share his meal.

I rejected the offer.

"Let's not waste time and get our bearings," I said. "Let's size up the condition of our troops and try to anticipate the enemy's intentions."

After a short pause Pavlov said:

"Well, I wonder what I can say about the situation. The enemy's sledgehammer blow caught our troops unawares. We were not alerted for combat and followed a peacetime routine, training at camps and training grounds. This is why we suffered heavy losses—mostly in aircraft, artillery and tanks, but also in men. The enemy has driven deep into our territory. Bobruisk and Minsk are occupied."

Pavlov complained that the directive to alert the troops for combat had come late. His complaint was partly justified. If the alert had arrived somewhat earlier and the Front Command had, for its part, done something to ready the troops for combat, the losses would have been much smaller and the enemy would have been stemmed.

The lateness of the alert was due to Stalin, the head of the government, trusting the non-aggression treaty with Germany and ignoring incoming information about nazi war preparations, which he dismissed as provocative. Stalin thought Hitler would not dare attack the Soviet Union. This is why he, for his part, did not dare to mount urgent and effective security measures, fearing that this would give the nazis a convenient pretext for attack.

The superior military authorities, too, bear part of the blame for the enemy assault being so much of a surprise and hence for the subsequent dramatic events of the frontier battle. They should have seen to it that the probable enemy was better known, that more information was available of nazi intentions, and of the concentration of nazi troops along our western frontier. If the government had had more exhaustive information about the situation on the border from our military authorities, I think it could not have ignored it. But even if it had ignored it—which would have been a glaring mistake on its part—the People's Commissariat for Defence and the General Staff could have taken appropriate steps within their

competence, for which government approval was not necessary. I have in mind steps to enhance combat readiness and to redouble the vigilance of men and officers. Some of the troops could have been deployed, ostensibly for training, from their winter quarters and training camps to fortified areas near the border. This applies also to the artillery, which was too far away at the hour of decision, and to the air force, which could have been secretly scattered from its stationary airfields to field strips.

Even these minor measures would have bettered the preparedness of our cover troops and reduced the disadvantage at which we were when the nazi assault began.

We would have then preserved part of our air force and could have fought the enemy with all modern weapons. Besides, if the Defence Commissariat and the General Staff had known the enemy's operational plans for the first few days of the war, and if they had estimated his strength more correctly, they could have guided the troops with greater confidence in the first few weeks and months of the war.

At the end of my conversation with Pavlov I decided to summon the top officers of the Front HQ.

Before the generals and other officers arrived, I went to see Marshals Kliment Voroshilov and Boris Shaposhnikov, who had shortly arrived at the HQ. They had come to look into the situation on the spot and help the Front Command.

Voroshilov said to me:

"The situation is very bad. There is no continuous front so far. In isolated areas our units are standing their ground tenaciously against superior enemy forces. Front Headquarters has practically no contact with them. Pavlov is not coping with control. Reserves and second echelons have got to be brought up at once to fill the gaps and hold up the enemy. The most important thing now is to organise proper troop control."

Shaposhnikov was more specific. He told me where the reserves should be sent without delay.

I also had a talk with Panteleimon Ponomarenko, Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party and Member of the Front Military Council. Like the two marshals, he

rebuked Front HQ and the Command for poor control of the troops.

Marshal Shaposhnikov, Ponomarenko, General Malandin and I went to the operations control post to meet the commanders of service arms, chiefs of Front departments and services, and the officers of Front Headquarters. They were informed that I was taking over the command. Then the chief of reconnaissance briefed us on enemy strength and the chief of the operations service told us about the state of the troops. The information was scanty. Reconnaissance and operations control were all too obviously below standard. It was clear, however, that the enemy was continuing his eastward advance after panzers and mobile troops, with massive air support, had delivered their devastating blow in the direction of Minsk and Bobruisk.

I summed up the situation briefly and said we had to stop the enemy. What we had to do was to shore up the defences at Minsk and Bobruisk, speed the deployment of the 1st Moscow Motorised Infantry Division around Borisov, and dispatch staff officers there to give all the help they could.

In the Bobruisk sector, it was essential that we keep the crossings of the Berezina River. This meant that we had to reinforce the units fighting there with cover detachments. Specific orders would be issued forthwith.

The biggest job in the existing situation was to prevent the enemy from impeding concentration and deployment of Soviet troops arriving from other regions of the country. These were to form a new line of defence to cover mobilisational deployment. The enemy had to be stopped at all costs by all available means. We had to win enough time for the fresh forces to take up positions along the Dvina and Dnieper.

I spent the rest of my first day in command of the Western Front studying the troops and the enemy. I issued a few orders and held counsel with the Chief of Staff and the officers at Front HQ. My chief concern was to assume proper control of the troops and bring order into the general confusion. I had to whip the Front into shape and make the troops fight in an organised fashion according to a definite plan, with all arms co-operating. It was all too clear to me that the enemy advance could not be

stopped, unless the troops were properly organised and followed a unified plan of combat.

After weighing the confused and complex situation over and over again, I issued my first directive:

Directive No. 14

Headquarters, Western Front
17.45 hours

Mogilev, July 1, 1941
Map 1:500,000

1. The enemy has captured Minsk and is straining to reach the Dnieper. His main objectives are Mogilev and Zhlobin.

The chief enemy force of 1,000-1,500 tanks is reported to be east of Minsk and up to 100 tanks have forced the Berezina near Bobruisk.

2. Our right and left flanks are bare.

The objective of the armies of the Front is to prevent the enemy from reaching the Dnieper and to hold the line along the Berezina River up to July 7 from Borisov to Bobruisk and Parichi, while protecting themselves from investment by tanks north of Borisov.

The tanks that have breached our line near Bobruisk must be destroyed.

3. The 13th Army, consisting of the 50th, 64th, 100th, 108th and 161st Infantry divisions, the Borisov garrison, the 7th Anti-Tank Brigade, the united cavalry force, control units of the 2nd and 44th Infantry Corps, and the 31st Cavalry Regiment of the High Command Reserve shall withdraw at night on July 2-3 and tenaciously defend the Berezina River along the Kholkholitsa-Borisov-Brodets line. The 50th Rifles Division shall stand by in reserve at Pogodishcha and the 7th Anti-Tank Brigade at Pogost.

The withdrawal is not to jeopardise defence of the intermediate line, Kholkholitsa-Smakov-Slobodka-Chernovets, which has to be held until July 2. The dividing line on the left is Stanovichi-Cherven-Bykov.

4. The 4th Army, consisting of the 55th and 156th infantry divisions, the united 42nd and the 6th infantry divisions, the 20th Motorised Corps and four cover detachments, shall withdraw at night on July 2-3 to the Berezina line and tenaciously hold the front from Brodets to Bob-

ruisk, with special emphasis on anti-tank defences at Svisloch and Mogilev. The cover units shall not allow enemy tanks to approach the Sloboda-Ozertsy line.

The withdrawal is to be so timed as to retain the intermediate line from Cherem to Osipovich until July 2.

5. By July 3 the Commander of the 17th Motorised Corps shall deploy his forces to the Kolba-Slobodka-Suma area and ready his troops for combat. On July 4 he is to be ready for action against Bobruisk with the objective of capturing the town in co-operation with the 204th Air-Borne Battalion and the 34th Infantry Division.

6. The Air Commander shall:

a) cover the withdrawal and concentration of troops along the Berezina Railway line;

b) stand by to support the attack of the 17th Motorised Corps and 155th Infantry Division against Bobruisk, co-operating with the attack force against enemy infantry and armour;

c) send out planes to destroy the enemy force occupying the Bobruisk airfield and the panzer columns east and west of Bobruisk at Smolevichi and Borisov.

7. As of July 4, 13th Army CP shall be at Gerin and 4th Army CP at Rogachov.

8. The CP of Front Headquarters is in the forest 12 kilometres north-east of Mogilev.

Note: Destroy this directive after perusal.

Front Commander
Eremenko

Military Council Member
Fominykh

Chief of Staff
Malandin

This directive helped to improve troop control and start an orderly withdrawal.

On the day the directive was issued I looked into matters related to the air arm. The air situation could not have been worse. Since June 22 enemy planes wrought destruction among the Soviet troops and in the rear, hindering troop concentration. The Luftwaffe was in complete control of the air.

The Front had very few planes (no more than 120 aircraft). Another 30 were added on July 1. Of these 150 planes only 52 were fighters. We decided to use the

available aircraft against the two prongs of Guderian's armoured force.

I ordered the first air raid on July 1. Before mid-day the planes sortied against Bobruisk and in the afternoon against Borisov. Fifteen assault planes covered by a flight of fighters raided crossings built by Guderian's troops across the Berezina. We knew the enemy would at once send fighters into the air and ordered another 24 of our own fighters into the area 7 to 8 minutes after the initial strike. Our move was successful. No sooner had our assault planes dropped bombs on the crossings and airfields at Bobruisk than the nazi fighters appeared. An air battle ensued. Our troops and the local population were jubilant when they saw five German planes shot down over Mogilev in a few minutes, with a sixth catching fire and rapidly losing altitude. In the Bobruisk area we managed to destroy 30 enemy planes. All in all, not less than 60 enemy planes were knocked out in two days. When I reported this to Moscow the Chief of the General Staff asked me to repeat the figure.

Our own losses added up to just 18 planes. A heroic feat was performed by twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Deputy of the Supreme Soviet and a former test pilot, Lt.-Col. Stepan Suprun. The Soviet ace engaged six nazi fighters and downed one of them. But he was outnumbered. After several direct hits Suprun's aircraft caught fire. He was mortally wounded. The hero's remains were buried by the local population and the men of the air defence service. Many years later the valorous pilot's grave was found.

Until then, the Luftwaffe had operated on a broad front in small groups, meeting with practically no opposition. For our part, we used our small force of planes en masse. This was the most effective thing to do in the circumstances. The air battles of those two days had a far-reaching effect. It was the first time the enemy experienced strong air assaults. The Soviet fliers took heart; they saw the enemy could be beaten if they fought skilfully and in organised fashion. The infantry was also greatly encouraged, for word of the nazi air losses spread quickly.

General Malandin and I handled a number of other highly urgent problems. The chief of the engineers was instructed to fortify the Mogilev area. A strong line of for-

tifications was erected in a matter of three or four days. It took the nazis all of ten days of heavy fighting (from July 1 to 10) to crash our anti-tank ditches, timber obstacles and minefields. We won valuable time and had a chance to deploy the arriving reserves.

We also tackled the question of incendiary means of combating tanks. Before the war, I had witnessed exercises in which anti-tank incendiaries were tested. On learning that a storehouse full of incendiary chemicals was available near Gomel, we organised their delivery by air. As much as 10,000 bottles of the fuel were flown to us. I lost no time ordering training sessions and organising anti-tank squads.

We also began organising partisan detachments. The Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party selected men from the Party actif, and my officers instructed them, issued equipment, rifles, hand-grenades and light machine guns. By June 30 we had formed 28 partisan detachments. This marked the beginning of the partisan movement. The Military Council of the Front instructed the partisans to set fire to planes at enemy airfields in the Bobruisk and Minsk areas, kill nazi pilots, destroy railway tracks and blow up bridges and depots. This was how the splendid movement of Soviet partisans, born in Byelorussia, embarked on its formative stage.

I am pleased to recall that the efficiency of Front Headquarters and the unit commands began gradually to improve. Discipline became more rigid and, what was most important, troop control became more effective. The Party bodies and all officers worked splendidly under the guidance of the staffs and the political service. This enabled us to recover from the initial shock. But it was only the beginning. Numerous hardships still lay ahead. It took months and months to remedy the consequences of Stalin's faulty judgement.

In a ten-day battle at Mogilev and a five-day battle at Borisov the enemy suffered considerable losses in men and arms. The two battles ushered in organised operations by the Red Army in the Western sector. Our troops had recovered somewhat from the sudden treacherous assault of the German regiments, but the situation was still precarious.

On July 3 Halder wrote in his diary he considered the nazi crossing of the Dvina and Dnieper a foregone accomplishment. He contended that it was no longer a matter of battling Soviet troops and rather a matter of seizing the industrial areas.

Halder sketched a plan for crushing Britain, because, as he put it, Russia was finished. He wrote, among other things, that in the near future further tasks in the war against Britain would again rise to the forefront and urged preparations for "an offensive between the Nile and the Euphrates".

General Hermann Hoth, however, sized up the situation more correctly. He wrote that on July 3 the 3rd Panzer Group was halted all along the front of our offensive.

CHAPTER THREE

WITH THE TWENTY-SECOND

Marshal of the Soviet Union Semyon Timoshenko, the People's Commissar for Defence, arrived at the Western Front on July 4 to assume personal command. I was appointed his deputy (by an order signed on July 2, 1941). It was clear by then that the main nazi forces were massed in the central sector of the Soviet-German front for an offensive against Moscow. The transfer of command in this sector to the People's Commissar for Defence was meant to fortify troop control.

The situation at Borisov was highly alarming. The fighting was very bitter. The enemy surpassed us considerably in strength, chiefly in armour. Enemy planes had complete control of the air. The plight of the defenders of Borisov was made more dismal still by the nearly complete absence of anti tank artillery and a lack of other means of anti tank warfare. The city defences were manned by the personnel of the local tank training school under the command of Corps Commissar Ivan Susaikov. The trainees and officers, headed by their chief, showed courage beyond compare, but, naturally, could not hold out for long against the overwhelming odds. On July 2 Borisov was captured by nazis. Their tanks crossed the Berezina by a bridge I had ordered to be blown up, but which wasn't. The men charged with the assignment reported later that technical reasons had prevented them from demolishing the bridge but a closer investigation revealed they had simply been remiss.

After Borisov fell, the 1st Moscow Motorised Infantry Division, just arrived from the capital, was urgently deployed into the area. I hastened to visit its positions. It had some 100 tanks, mostly T-26 models, with a sprinkling

of T-34s. The division was commanded by Col. Yakov Kreizer. Together with surviving units of the Borisov Tank School and other retreating groups, the motorised division managed to check the enemy, who was trying furiously to break through along the Minsk-Moscow highway. A counter-attack was mounted, which held up the enemy for two days. Col. Kreizer was made Hero of the Soviet Union for this skilful operation, and for the courage he showed in battle.

Here is what Guderian wrote about it: "The impression on the 18th Panzer Division was strong enough, because this was the first time T 34 tanks were used by the enemy, against which our guns of that time were powerless."*

We employed the tactics of mobile defence, retreating from line to line and making the most of every opportunity to mount swift counter-attacks. In my report dated July 4, 1941, I said:

"All day long the 13th Army battled for the crossing over the Berezina River. The 50th Infantry Division crossed to the east bank of the Berezina and assumed the defensive on the Kholkholtitsa-Studenka line. The 1st Motorised Infantry Division and a combined unit of the Borisov garrison fought off motorised enemy units that had crossed the river at Borisov and Chernyavka. The 1st Motorised Infantry Division, active along the Krupka line, showed models of bravery. The division has suffered heavy losses. One of its regiments, holding a line north of Borisov, has been badly battered by enemy air raids. . . .

"The enemy fired armour piercing shells. They were powerless against the armour of tanks but smashed the tracks. The division had to assume the defensive."

This was how we kept the enemy in check all the way to Orsha, to the approaches of which Lt.-Gen. Pavel Kurochkin had by then deployed his 20th Army. Kurochkin's army had organised an enduring line of defence and held its ground heroically, until it was invested on both flanks. Ultimately, it was ordered to withdraw to a new line.

On July 6, I was summoned from the Borisov area by Marshal Timoshenko. We met at a road-crossing north of

* Guderian, op. cit., S. 148.

Orsha. In attendance, too, were Lt.-Gen. Kurochkin and Mj.-Gen. Arseny Borzikov, Assistant Front Commander for Armoured Troops.

In the bushes by the roadside we briefly discussed the general situation. I briefed the assembly about the battles in the Borisov area. The situation was tense, but encouraging: we had managed to create a continuous front; it was not too strong, it was true, but continuous all the same. Our armies had preserved 30 to 40 per cent of their strength in the battle lines, and the 5th and 7th Mechanised Corps had already arrived to join the fighting.

The enemy was straining at the leash and bent on preventing us from forming a new front. Mobile groups under Guderian and Hoth with massive air support, were thrusting forward

By July 4, Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group reached Lepel, Ulla and Polotsk. In the meantime, part of the 2nd Panzer Group under Guderian broke through to Bykhov. This, and particularly the success of the 3rd Panzer Group, created a grave threat to the right flank of our Front, particularly our 22nd Army, which had not yet completed deployment.

That day the positions of the 22nd Army were attacked by the 19th Panzer Division north-west of Polotsk, the 18th Motorised Division at the approaches to Polotsk and the 20th Panzer Division at Ulla.

Two panzer divisions, the 20th and 7th, captured Lepel and advanced on Vitebsk, aiming to stab at the point where the Soviet 22nd and 20th Armies joined.

At the same time, a panzer division of Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group reached the bank of the Dnieper at Bykhov and assaulted the crossings, eager to secure passage for the 24th Panzer Corps towards Slavgorod (Propoisk), the 46th Panzer Corps towards Gorki, Pochinok and Yelna, and the 47th towards Smolensk.

The Commander of the Front decided that Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group presented the chief menace, for it was advancing from Lepel-Polotsk towards Vitebsk and the country north of that city. All of us agreed with his point of view. However, to counter this danger I thought it best to mount a lightning attack just when the enemy would be hammering his wedge into our line of defence. I thought



T 34 attacking under the covering fire of a 45-mm gun

that mounting a deep counter-blow with mechanised corps far in advance of our defence lines was not likely to be successful, because our troops would be inevitably isolated from adjoining units and would have no air and anti-aircraft coverage. This did not mean that I opposed operations in depth by large mechanised forces as a general rule. But it was necessary at the time to reckon with the specific situation.

In accordance with a High Command directive Marshal Timoshenko issued an order (which he showed me beforehand) to defend the line of the Polotsk fortified area, the Dvina Senno-Orsha line and the line along the Dnieper, and prevent the enemy from breaking through in the northern and eastern directions.

The 22nd Army was ordered to defend the Polotsk fortified line and the line along the Dvina up to Beshenkovichi inclusive. The 20th Army was to defend Beshenkovichi and Shklov, and the 21st Army Mogilev, Bykhov and Loyev.

Kurochkin, the general in command of the 20th Army, was ordered to destroy the main enemy group advancing from the Lepel area. His 5th and 7th Mechanised Corps were to counter-attack from north of Orsha in the

direction of Senno, and then exploit the attack to advance on Lepel and Kublichy against the flank of enemy troops advancing on Vitebsk.

The final order issued by the Front Commander said: "The lines along the Dvina and Dnieper are to be held firmly and a determined offensive is to be mounted in the morning of July 6, 1941, with the purpose of destroying the enemy group at Lepel."

The depth of the assaults was estimated at 140 km (from Visokoye and Orlovka station to Senno and Lepel) for the 5th Corps and at 130 km (from Rudnya and Krynki station to Beshenkovichi and Lepel) for the 7th Corps. The depth of the subsequent mission amounted to as much as 200 km.

By and large, the mechanised corps assigned for the counter-attack were at full strength, each of them with more than 700 tanks. But only few of these were KV and T-34 tanks. Most of them were the obsolete BT-7 and T-26 tanks. The enemy, on the other hand, had some 1,000 of the latest tanks commanded by experienced panzer officers. But what plagued us most was that our two corps had to operate without virtually any air umbrella (for the Western Front had no more than 55-65 battle-worthy fighter planes).

The counter-attack suggested by the High Command conflicted with the measures planned before Timoshenko took command of the Front. It was more desirable in the circumstances, I thought, to concentrate the 5th and 7th Corps in the Smolensk Vitebsk Orsha triangle, where they could parry enemy break-throughs of the Vitebsk-Orsha defence line.

In the morning of July 6, the 3rd Panzer Group force-crossed the Western Dvina at two points, the 19th Panzer Division and 18th Motorised Division getting across at Disna and the 20th Panzer Division at Ulla. Now the enemy had bridgeheads on the northern bank of the river, creating an extremely tense situation in the zone held by the 22nd Army, whose deployment had not yet been completed.

On the same morning our 5th and 7th Mechanised Corps struck their counter blow. They got off to a fairly good start. Overwhelming enemy resistance, they came to the area north and south of Senno, but were met by the 17th and 18th panzer divisions, rushed in to cope with the situa-

tion. The two Soviet corps repulsed the vigorous onslaught of the Nazi panzers and managed to hold up the advance of the rest of the 3rd Panzer Group to the Dnieper. The tankers of the 5th Corps under Mj.-Gen. Ilya Alexeyenko displayed extreme bravery.

However, the counter-attack of the Soviet mechanised corps petered out. Nazi planes pounced on them, and our troops suffered heavy losses. They were compelled to begin a withdrawal in a difficult situation, constantly harassed by enemy panzers and planes.

The main reasons for the failure of our counter attack was the lack of air and anti-aircraft cover, massive enemy air attacks, poor co-operation of the two corps, and of tank, artillery and infantry units; to top it all, the command was none too efficient.

This is where we could have used the type of mechanised army with staff and control that Gen. Romanenko spoke about at the pre-war conference. If the two corps had been formed into an army with a staff and a general in command, troop control would certainly have been of a higher standard.

Besides, on July 2 the Commander of the 4th Panzer Army, consisting of Guderian's and Hoth's panzer groups, had received orders to mount an offensive along a relatively narrow front on the Western Dvina and the Dnieper with five panzer corps of Army Group Centre, massively supported by the Luftwaffe.

After our roadside conference, at which Marshal Timoshenko gave me a number of instructions, I left for the extreme right flank of the Front held by our 22nd Army. Some of the 22nd Army units were at full strength. Others had suffered heavy losses and were badly mauled. The 126th Infantry Division, for example, had just 2,355 men left. The Army had a little over 100 tanks, of which a mere 15 were T-34s, and 698 guns, of which just 226 were 45 mm.

The 22nd Army CP was in a forest near Nevel. Mj.-Gen. Filipp Yershakov, a man of great courage, was in command. Always a cool and level-headed officer, he was exacting and firm in his decisions. He and Mj.-Gen. Georgi Zakharov, his Chief of Staff, who was operationally well grounded, strong, but excessively temperamental, sometimes even pugnacious, made an excellent team.

When I arrived, the 22nd Army was dispositioned along a line running from the Sebezh fortified area to Vitebsk inclusive. It was an arc-shaped, convex front, defensively favourable. But it was too long for an army to hold (200 km), amounting to more than 30 kilometres per division.

Two army corps of the nazi 16th Army and units of Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group, totalling 8 infantry, 3 panzer and 3 motorised divisions, were advancing in the 22nd Army sector. Besides, two more nazi divisions of the 9th Field Army were approaching the Western Dvina at Disna.

On July 7 the enemy engaged the 22nd Army all along the line. The nazi objective was to crush the Soviet troops and come out on the flank and in the rear of the Western Front. The Germans mounted three concentrical assaults—on the right flank across Sebezh on Idritsa with the 10th Army Corps, in the centre through Disna and Vorkovichi on Nevel with the 57th Motorised Corps and on the left flank through Gorodok on Velikiye Luki with parts of the 39th Motorised Corps. The attack in the centre was an auxiliary one, aimed at pinning down the 22nd Army frontally, while the pincer efforts would envelop it.

This was a favourite nazi manoeuvre. They had a name for it: a kettle. As a rule, the convergent operations began simultaneously, although sometimes the central effort, whose objective it was to pin down the enemy, was mounted a day or two earlier to make us deploy reserves to the centre and weaken the flanks. This time, the central attack began a day earlier than the other two.

Our resistance was poorly organised at first. The enemy jumped off in the morning of July 7, but Army HQ did not get to know about it until the evening, although there was contact with corps and divisional headquarters. At midnight on July 7-8 we received a puzzling telegram from the Commander of the 62nd Infantry Corps, Mj.-Gen. Ivan Karmanov. "At 23.00 hours," it said, "the enemy attacked the 166th Regiment of the 126th Infantry Division with 200 planes, inflicting heavy losses and causing it to retreat in disorder."

None of us were prepared to trust the telegram, because at that time the Germans never raided at night, particularly in such strength. I decided to look into the matter myself.

But I gained little or nothing by going to the command post of the 62nd Infantry Corps, because it was in a forest 50 kilometres from the front lines. Unfortunately, Gen. Karmanov was very poorly informed of the state of affairs.

So Karmanov and I set out for the headquarters of the 126th Infantry Division, located in a forest some 25-30 kilometres from the troops. There I found out that the Commander of the 166th Infantry Regiment had abandoned his CP during a minor Nazi artillery bombardment of the regiment's battle line. As for the raid by 200 Nazi planes, it was, as I had suspected, a figment of his imagination.

The regimental commander had to be removed. I issued instructions to restore order in the 166th Regiment and quickly assigned two reserve battalions to counter-attack the Nazis, who were already approaching divisional headquarters. The counter-attack was led by the division commander himself. The Corps Commander and I were on the spot as well.

Our artillerymen opened up and the battalions fought like lions. Despite the heavy enemy shelling, we drove the Nazis back several kilometres. After this, we brought up fresh troops and set up a new line of defence.

By this time, order was restored in the 166th Regiment. Its strength was quite impressive, exceeding two full battalions. I spoke to its officers and established that the regiment's casualties had been insignificant. The disorderly withdrawal began after the unit had been abandoned by its commander, who showed a yellow streak.

The newly appointed regimental commander led his unit firmly. The battalions mounted a gallant attack and fought the enemy tooth and nail. In the next few days resistance in this sector was tenacious.

At the end of the second day of my stay with the 62nd Infantry Corps I received a report that the enemy had crashed through into the Sebezh fortified area and advanced 30 kilometres on the 22nd Army's right flank. The neighbouring 27th Army had rolled back, baring the right flank of the 22nd.

After the war we learned from German sources that 16 enemy divisions were involved in the action against the 7 divisions of our 22nd.

On receiving the bad news, we left for the sector held by the 51st Infantry Corps under Mj.-Gen. Akim Markov. It was some 200 kilometres away, and our route lay through Nevel. On the way, we called at Army IIQ, where I told Marshal Timoshenko what measures had been taken in the Disna-Vorkovich area.

As we approached Sebezh we met the commander and commissar of the Sebezh fortified area. They had abandoned it, figuring they would not be able to hold out. The machine-gun battalions that had manned the fortified area, were in retreat. I stopped the withdrawal and ordered the troops to return to the abandoned positions. Soon, we reached the battle lines, where fighting proceeded for the town of Sebezh in the sector held by the 717th Infantry Regiment of the 170th Infantry Division. The regimental commander reported he was engaged by superior enemy forces and that the situation was precarious. He handed me a map captured shortly before from a German officer. It showed the general plan of the nazi offensive.

From my personal observations and from captured documents I estimated that at least two nazi divisions with panzer support were advancing in the Sebezh sector. The brunt of their attack hit the 717th Infantry Regiment under the command of Mj. Malkhau Gogigaishvili. The regiment fought gallantly, containing much superior enemy forces.

I put the machine-gun battalions of the fortified area under the regimental commander's charge and assured him reserves would arrive soon. Actually, there were no reserves in the vicinity, save a tank battalion some 50 kilometres from the scene of the battle.

We drove on then to the command post of Mj.-Gen. Tikhon Silkin, Commander of the 170th Infantry Division. He was in command of the sector, which included the fortified area and all the troops defending it. I helped Silkin and his deputies to get their bearings and improve control. They did not have any combat experience to speak of and barely managed to cope with the highly complicated situation.

Our determined measures put a halt to the enemy offensive at Sebezh for some time. We returned to 22nd Army Headquarters, where Mj.-Gen. Georgi Zakharov, the Chief of Staff, informed me that the enemy had assumed the offensive on July 9 on the Army's left, near Vitbsk,



A machine-gun emplacement

where it adjoined the 20th Army. The 98th Infantry Division, stretched thin in the Vitebsk sector, had been flung back and was now concentrating in the forest north-west of Gorodok. The Gorodok-Nevel sector was, in effect, bare and undefended.

"What reserves have we in and around Nevel?" I asked Zakharov.

He told me we had four tanks and four high-speed tractor-drawn anti-tank guns, the headquarters guard and one anti-tank regiment, which had just assembled north of Nevel and constituted the Army reserve.

After holding counsel, we decided to attach the tanks and anti-tank guns to the anti-tank regiment, reinforce it with about 40-50 infantrymen and send it towards Gorodok with orders to keep the enemy out of Nevel until reserves arrive.

The reinforced anti-tank regiment was duly alerted and set out at 4 p.m. on July 10 from the Nevel area along the Nevel-Gorodok highway. At dusk, a group of officers and I drove out to join it.

It had stopped some 20 kilometres from Gorodok. That was where we caught up with it. The regimental commander reported the situation and told us of his decision to organise his defences at that particular spot. This did not seem right to me. I instructed him to leave one battery in the location, which was very favourably covered by lakes and swamps and was unapproachable for panzers. Guns covered the almost inaccessible terrain at pointblank range.

The rest of the regiment moved on. Twelve kilometres from Gorodok we placed one more battery in a very favourable position, covering the highway and an open stretch of country beside it. Thereby, we gave depth to our defence, though, so far, we had only covered the road.

The regiment marched farther still. The tanks advanced in the van, one of them on guard duty (for it was mid-summer and light) followed by two other vehicles and the regimental commander. The tractor drawn 45 mm guns moved behind the tanks, and then a battalion of 85 mm guns.

Soon, the patrol tank reported it had spotted the enemy and had stopped. Three enemy armoured vehicles had appeared on the northern outskirt of Gorodok and, spotting the Soviet tank, opened fire. Our tanks replied. After the fourth salvo, one of the enemy vehicles caught fire, while the others wheeled and disappeared behind the houses.

This was the line we picked for our stand. An artillery battalion under Capt. Chapayev, son of the Civil War hero Vasily Chapayev, was ordered to take up fire positions left of the road 2.5 km north of Gorodok, while the 45 mm guns were placed to the right of the road. The gap between the positions was taken up by the tanks. We put the BT-7 and T-31 tanks in the van, and the KV tanks some 150-200 metres behind them. Coverage was afforded by a company of infantry.

On discovering our advance to Gorodok, the enemy reinforced his forward units. Three or four panzers, five or six armoured vehicles and something like a company of motorised infantry appeared ahead.

As soon as we spotted them, our artillery, tanks and rifles opened up. We had the advantage of having readied

for action, while the enemy had to take up positions under fire.

After a short engagement half the nazi panzers and armoured vehicles were damaged. The rest fled. Spirits ran high among the men: this was the first, albeit modest, victory in the first battle they had ever fought.

Our purpose was to win 15 to 18 hours, until the 214th Infantry Division, then detaining between Nevel and Veli-kiye Luki, would come to our help. I had already issued an order to that effect and had sent 100 lorries to transport the troops. At that time the 214th was still some 90 km away from us.

We had no accurate information as to the enemy's strength in and around Gorodok, but were determined to stand our ground to the last. After we had scattered the forward nazi group of armoured vehicles I ordered a barrage. Our bombardment lasted about 20 minutes. It was meant to create the impression that at least 50 guns and a battalion of infantry reinforced by tanks were in action. The enemy was obviously worried and tried once more to advance from the eastern outskirt of Gorodok, but was again flung back by gunfire. This made the nazis decide on a hasty withdrawal westward. For nearly 24 hours, our unit kept the enemy at a respectable distance from the town. By that time, we were joined by units of the 214th Infantry Division.

During my stay with the 22nd Army I arrived at the following conclusions:

- 1) At the time of deployment of newly arrived raw troops under enemy fire, all commanders and political officers must concentrate on organisation and maintenance of order. The enemy, intoxicated by temporary successes, is likely to undertake various provocations, seeking to create panic and confusion, which are disastrous for any army. Spies and saboteurs infiltrated our troops to sow disorder. Sometimes, refugees from enemy-occupied areas helped them unconsciously, and sometimes battle-fatigued servicemen did too, frightened after the first setback. It is therefore absolutely essential for all officers to exercise vigorous measures at all times in combating panic and disorder.

- 2) Some commanders show a lack of initiative; they do

not know how to turn the tide, waiting for something to happen. After a while I realised that this lack of faith in their own ability and their expectation of miraculous help from outside were the effect of the personality cult. Most people, including fairly prominent leaders, were accustomed to all the more important decisions being made cut-to-measure by their superiors. This hampered our efforts in the early days of the war, when we had to operate with depleted strength.

Detachment commanders waited for what their unit commanders would decide, while the latter waited for decisions higher up, and so on. The soldier and sergeant were kept in the dark, and had no chance to act. It was essential to impress upon all officers, from platoon commanders upward, that they had to show the maximum of initiative at all times, to take action, to engage or attack the enemy, to defend every inch of Soviet soil. We realised early in the war how urgent it was to build up large tank commands for strategic operational purposes and also to organise tank units for direct infantry support. We recalled ruefully how keenly the matter was contested at the December 1940 conference.

If the Soviet infantry facing the powerful nazi onslaught had had tank support, it would have rendered the invaders far stronger resistance.

The use of motors made the infantry mobile, and extensive use of tanks gave ground troops immense striking power in addition to mobility.

In the first few weeks of the war the infantry learned the strength of tanks in a modern battle from experience. The infantry realised that success largely depended on its having tanks in the battle line. The tanks shored up the defence, and were particularly useful in counter-attacks and offensive actions. On the very rare occasions when we had tanks to fortify our combat positions, the infantry acted with greater vigour and our counter moves were much more effective. Conversely, in the absence of tanks, our attacks were mostly slow and yielded little success.

Once I was convinced of this, I sent the Supreme Commander a report suggesting that tanks be made part of infantry units for direct support. The report was dated July 7, 1941. Here is what it said:

"Moscow, High Command, Comrade Stalin:

"Having taken part in the fighting around Borisov on July 2 and 3, 1941, and in the Drisa-Barkovichi area on July 4, 5 and 6, 1941, I have become convinced of the benefits of having tanks in infantry combat lines.

"In the battles at Borisov our motorised infantry division and combined detachments consisting of retreating units reinforced by 70 tanks rendered extremely strong resistance and mounted brief counter-attacks which the enemy could not withstand.

"It was different at Barkovichi, where I also organised several counter-attacks but achieved little success because there were no tanks to 'spur on' the infantry. At present, the battles are mobile and if a division commander had tanks at his disposal he could always safely send part of his troops forward by motor. He often does it now, though unable to support them with mobile fire from tanks. Whenever our tanks accompanied the infantry, even if they came in small groups, they created confusion among the enemy.

"For this reason, I beg you to consider the question of attaching one or two tank companies to every division, or at least one tank battalion to every corps.

"I believe that our T-26 tanks are less useful in mechanised commands than with the infantry, although mechanised commands, too, should have some T-26 tanks (since other models are few). All the same, part of the tanks should be handed to the infantry to stiffen it up.

"Lt.-Gen. Eremenko."

Before and during the war, the question of operational tank commands and tank units for direct infantry support was raised time and again, but did not get the due hearing. Furthermore, organisational blunders occurred when tank commands were being activated.

After tank corps were disbanded, the vehicles were turned over to the infantry. But organisationally they were formed into battalions and brigades, and that was the basis on which combat training had proceeded. All attack exercises were held with tanks. Yet when the war broke out the infantry had little or no tanks. This occurred because operational tank commands were completely dissolved at first. and then tank units for infantry support

were dissolved as well, just as sweepingly. Yet we had had enough tanks for both purposes.

On July 10, I returned to Front IIQ at Gnezdovo, a little place near Smolensk. Marshals Semyon Timoshenko and Boris Shaposhnikov asked me to tell them about the state of affairs in the 22nd Army sector, and I took advantage of the opportunity to speak about the conclusions I had drawn concerning our troops. They agreed with me. I made a detailed report on the measures taken by me at Sebezh and Gorodok.

The situation in the sector held by the 22nd Army was just about the same as elsewhere. Under pressure of superior enemy forces, continuously menaced by total encirclement, fighting heavy battles and mounting counter attacks, the troops were rolling back slowly, clinging to one defence line after another. Countless feats of valour were performed by the troops in these exceptionally difficult circumstances. A detailed account has still to be compiled, for no more or less exhaustive history of the 22nd Army is yet available.

CHAPTER FOUR

GALLANT MOGILEV

Important things were happening on the southern wing of the Western Front in the Mogilev sector held by the 13th Army

No account of the Battle of Smolensk, the culmination point of the early period of the war, could be complete without a reference to the record of the 13th Army. It has been very difficult to piece together a picture of the savage fighting in the Mogilev area. The battle there was a truly undying chapter in the history of the past war, epitomising the amazing heroism and devotion of the Soviet people. So far, we have just this preliminary survey of the events, that will doubtless yet attract the attention of a serious and thorough investigator.

July 3, 1941, the day vanguard troops of the nazi 2nd Panzer Group reached the distant approaches to the city and engaged the security units of our 61st Corps, should probably be considered the beginning of the heroic defence of Mogilev.

It was borne home to the Soviet Command all too clearly at the time that the nazis had set their sights on the Mogilev sector. They flung their whole 24th Panzer Corps against it. When Front HQ was informed of this in the morning of July 7, it placed the troops on its southern wing under the headquarters of two armies, the 21st and 13th.

The 13th, commanded by Gen. Pyotr Filatov, whose HQ was quartered in Mogilev, was given the 61st Infantry Corps (53rd, 172nd and 110th divisions) and the 45th Infantry Corps (187th, 148th and 132nd divisions) of the 21st Army. The same order instructed the 13th Army to defend the Dnieper River line from Shklov to Novy Bykhov.

As I see it, there were three distinct stages in the defence of Mogilev. The first, from July 3 to 9, 1941, consisted of engagements by reconnaissance and vanguard units at the distant approaches to the city. The units assigned to defend the Dnieper line sent out reconnaissance groups to engage nazi vanguard detachments and obtain information about the enemy. The reconnaissance groups were followed by detachments of a reinforced battalion for reconnaissance in force. The detachments took up favourable positions 20 to 25 kilometres beyond the main defence line to meet the enemy and force him to reform for battle by means of audacious attacks. This slowed up the nazi advance and gave us precious time to put up fortifications along the Dnieper and disposition troops arriving from the rear.

During the second stage, from July 9 to 16, stubborn defensive battles raged in the forward zone and the main defence line outside Mogilev, followed by numerous counter-attacks to wipe out bridgeheads captured by the enemy on the eastern bank of the Dnieper on both flanks of the 61st Corps. The main outcome of the fighting in this stage was that it mauled and whittled down enemy manpower and arms.

The third stage lasted from July 16 to 27, after the troops defending Mogilev were encircled. Units of the 61st Corps were ringed by the enemy and sliced up. The 172nd Infantry Division and a regiment of the 110th Infantry Division were cut off from the rest of the Corps.

It was the heroism of the defenders of the Dnieper line that highlighted the third stage of the Mogilev defence. They stood their ground firmly and fought to their dying breath against an enemy who outnumbered them at least 5 to 1. Attempts were made to break out of the enemy pocket, and despite tremendous losses, the battle within the ring did a great service to our main force, because the depleted units of the unvanquished Mogilev garrison drew off a whole nazi army corps, impairing co-operation in the sector between the Wehrmacht's mechanised and general commands for a significant length of time.

The main burden of the Dnieper defence at Mogilev fell on Mj.-Gen. Fyodor Bakunin's 61st Infantry Corps.

In the morning of June 29 Bakunin and his Chief of



F A Bakunin

Staff, accompanied by the chief of artillery, visited Western Front HQ, located in the Mogilev area. Bakunin's troops began arriving in the area on the same day. The first to arrive was the 388th Infantry Regiment of the 172nd Division under Col. Semyon Kutepov, who had commanded it for nearly three years. The regiment was ready for combat and its commander was well in control of it. He was disciplined, smart and exacting. His regiment was the best in the division. It was ordered to occupy defences west of Mogilev, straddling the Mogilev-Belynichi highway.

The 514th Infantry Regiment of the 172nd (regimental commander Lt. Col. Sergei Bonich) arrived on the same day. Bonich had been in command since graduating with honours from the Frunze Military Academy in 1940. His 514th was assigned a sector from Zatishye to Tishovka along the Mogilev-Bobruisk highway. Fortifications there were already being built by the local population when the troops arrived, and the soldiers pitched in at once.

Corps Commander Bakunin told me the 110th Infantry Division (under Vasily Khlebtsev, an old cavalryman and a First World War and Civil War veteran) had also arrived in good shape. It took up positions along the Shklov-Mos-tock line, stretching along the eastern bank of the Dnieper.

Units of the 53rd Division (Commander Filipp Konovlov) began arriving on July 3. The division had had to cover a big distance on foot, and was bombed en route. It had spread out, and it was not until late on July 5 that it assumed combat positions along the Kopy's Shklov line.

Colonel Ivan Grishin, Commander of the 137th Infantry Division, showed up at Corps CP on July 4. His division was attached to the 61st Corps as reinforcement, and assigned to defend the Ponizovye (south of Orsha)-Levki line along the eastern bank of the Dnieper.

From June 27 to July 7 all staff and political officers and most of the Corps services went directly to the units, helping their commanders organise defences, adjust the system of fire, lay minefields, build fire positions, set up CPs and observation posts, dig trenches and achieve good camouflage. Soldiers and officers were instructed how to fight tanks with incendiary bottles and bundles of hand-grenades.

The Corps Commander and his Commissar, Ivan Voronov, visited the units and most of the sub-units, urging them to build the defences more quickly and reminding the men that a soldier in a trench is stronger than the enemy advancing across open land.

As I have already said, the 61st Corps was put under the 13th Army Command and made contact with its neighbour on the left on July 7. Part of the 137th Division had not yet arrived and was unable to build all the necessary fortifications. Trenches had been dug in the forward zone and minefields were laid in tankable terrain. That was all. The 53rd Division, too, had dug trenches, but they were without communication links. It had also laid minefields and demolished the bridges across the Dnieper at Kopy's and Shklov.

The 110th and 172nd divisions, on the other hand, had organised their defences not only frontally, but also in depth. Their CPs and observation posts, particularly those of the 172nd, were very good. Minefields were laid along the front and in depth, and the divisions built up anti-tank reserves.

True, there were misunderstandings over the fortifications. Some of the soldiers and officers still had peacetime illusions. Bakunin recalls, for example, that when he, Corps

Commissar Voronov and Colonel Kulepov, Commander of the 388th Regiment, were inspecting the front lines, they saw an infantry company digging trenches in an obviously unsuitable spot. A height perfectly suited for defence was not more than 200 metres away. General Bakunin pointed it out to Colonel Kulepov and said the height offered the advantage of good observation and better firing. The regimental commander replied that he was aware of it too, but that a field of wheat was ripening on the height and he thought it a shame to trample the harvest and damage collective farm property. The Corps Commander had had to prevail on Kulepov that in wartime military advantage took precedence over the harvest.

Despite some such misunderstandings the officers who had had time enough, coped well with the task of organising effective defences.

But the enemy was strong. On July 5, 1941, a ferocious panzer and infantry attack drove back the forward units of the 137th Division at Kokhanovo (20 km west of Orsha). In the meantime, advance detachments of the 172nd made contact with the enemy along the Drut River and near Belynichi, Zapotochye and Olyen preventing him from crossing the Drut. Nazi planes bombed the Orsha and Mogilev districts. The raids on the Orsha area and the Minsk Smolensk highway were especially fierce. Our air had gradually become more active, but losses were heavy because of the shortage of fighter planes for cover.

All through July 6 forward units of the 172nd kept the enemy in check along the Drut. On the right flank, southwest of Orsha, panzers and infantry captured Baran village, and on the following day the nazis tried crossing the Dnieper at several points, but their attempts proved abortive.

In the sector of the 137th Division our advance units were pressed back to the bank of the Lokhva by a large panzer and infantry force. All day, the Luftwaffe pounded the 137th and 172nd, and swooped down on command and observation posts.

On July 7, Lt.-Gen. Filatov, Commander of the 13th Army, was summoned to the Chief of Staff at the Front CP. On the way back his car was strafed by enemy planes.

Filatov was seriously wounded. He was taken to a safe place, then sent to a field hospital and later evacuated to the Botkin Clinic in Moscow. But the doctors' efforts were in vain. We lost him, a gifted and strong general, to whom goes a good share of the credit for our stubborn defence of Mogilev.

In the afternoon of July 8 Lt. Gen. Fyodor Remizov, an experienced officer, took command of the 13th Army. I had met him many times before the war, and knew him to be a fine man, a stalwart soldier and a knowledgeable exacting commander.

Acting on the instructions of Front Headquarters, Remizov issued an order for his troops to stand their ground.

All in all, our front line was about 100 kilometres long. Save for the Mogilev area, fortifications in the sector had not been built beforehand and it had been impossible to erect strong defences in the short space of time we had had at our disposal. On top of this, many of the Army's units were understrength.

The regrouping of troops was not yet completed. The 187th Division, for example, was scattered along a frontage of 70 kilometres. One of its regiments was in the 21st Army sector and two others were dispositioned in the sector of the 13th Army.

At dawn on July 9 panzers broke through the defences of the 20th Mechanised Corps, rounding its flanks at Kuta and Ugalya. The Corps Commander decided to annihilate the intruders. He did considerable damage to an SS regiment, wiped out a motorised bridge building battalion and routed a signals battalion. Subsequently the 20th Mechanised Corps was pulled out of the battle and concentrated at Starenka for reinforcement. It had fought the nazis all the way from Minsk and was badly depleted.

To clarify the course of events in the 13th Army sector I want to quote a few passages by Guderian, whose troops were engaged in the area.

Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group, consisting of the 24th, 46th and 47th Panzer Corps — all of it, except a part of the 47th — clashed with our 13th Army.

In a passage dated July 1, 1941, Guderian wrote:

"At 9.30 a.m. a reinforced reconnaissance unit set out from the Berezina bridgehead east of Bobruisk towards

Mogilev, followed by the main force of the 3rd Panzer Division in a general eastward direction. General von Geyr reserved the right to decide, depending on developments, whether to head for Rogachov or Mogilev. Air reconnaissance discovered on the same day that the Russians were assembling fresh forces in the Smolensk Orsha Mogilev area. We had to make haste if we wanted to capture the Dnieper line without waiting for the infantry to arrive, which would entail a loss of weeks."

Guderian went on to observe that on July 4 one of his panzer divisions, the 4th, reached Bykhov. On July 7 another, the 3rd, reached Novy Bykhov and the 10th reached Belynieli.* Here is what he wrote:

"On July 7, I had to decide whether to continue my rapid advance and cross the Dnieper with my panzer forces, thus attaining my original objectives as quickly as prescribed in the original plan of operations, or whether to slow down in face of the Russian measures to defend the river line and wait for our infantry armies to move up before mounting a battle for the river.

"Immediate attack was prompted by the present weakness of Russian defences, which were still in the building stage. Yet there were strongly fortified bridgeheads at Rogachov, Mogilev and Orsha. Our attempts to seize Rogachov and Mogilev with sudden thrusts had failed. Approaching transports of Russian reinforcements were reported. But it would be about a fortnight before our infantry arrived, and by then Russian resistance was sure to grow considerably stronger. It was doubtful that the infantry would succeed in smashing a well organised river defence and let us resume a war of manoeuvre. It would become still more doubtful that we would then achieve our original operational goals and complete the campaign in the autumn of 1941. This was the crux of the matter.

"I was deeply conscious of the weight of my decision. I took account of the dangers to our bare flank after all three panzer corps would have crossed the Dnieper. All the same, I was so deeply conscious of the importance and feasibility of the task ... that I ordered an immediate

attack across the Dnieper and the continuance of our advance on Smolensk.”*

Guderian mentions his controversy with Fieldmarshal Hans Günther von Kluge, Commander of Army Group Centre, who wanted him to halt the offensive and wait for the infantry. Guderian took the upper hand in their argument.

Looking at things retrospectively, we might say that Guderian's plan was more serviceable than von Kluge's from the point of view of the nazi command. Indeed, if the nazis had halted for a fortnight, we would have succeeded in erecting stronger defences along the Dnieper. They would have been almost as strong as those in the Rogachov area and at Mogilev.

This is supported by our Mogilev experience. Yet Guderian's ideas were foolhardy all the same, because he banked on consummating the offensive within the time limits set in the Barbarossa Plan. If our command had known the enemy's designs more accurately, and if it had been better informed of the enemy's actual condition--if, in short, it had assessed the general situation more precisely—we could have done irreparable damage to Guderian's panzer armada. For this we should have concentrated the fresh forces coming in from the rear in areas where the 2nd Panzer Group would have its flanks after forcing the Dnieper. A series of strong counter-attacks could then have been mounted with success before the German infantry arrived. Regrettably, we did not know nazi infantry was still so far behind. Moreover, for various objective and subjective reasons, the Soviet Supreme Command was unable to assess the situation conclusively. Every time it had to face up to accomplished facts. All it did was issue orders to restore the situation as soon as a nazi break through occurred, which really amounted to a squandering of reserves.

It will be recalled that Guderian's and Hoth's panzer forces included motorised infantry and had generous air support, whereas our units were chiefly infantry, in effect, were deprived of tank and air coverage, and, moreover, lacked experience in modern warfare. The enemy's opera-

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 151-52.

tional plans and his strength were unknown to our command. The strategic and operational initiative was entirely in nazi hands. Nazi tactics had been poorly studied by us. So, Guderian's decision did not involve as much risk as he intimated, for in the first stage of the war the nazis held very many military trumps.

I do not mean to say that nazi plans and operations in the early period of the war were anything but adventurous. For various now well known reasons, the Soviet Union and its army was not at the time able to act to the full extent of its resources.

Here is what Guderian writes about his specific plan of forcing the Dnieper:

"The points of crossing were restricted to the heavily manned Russian bridgeheads. The 24th Panzer Corps was, by agreement with General von Geyr, to attack Bykhov on July 10, the 16th Panzer Corps was to force the river at Shklov on July 11, and the 47th at Kopys between Mogilev and Orsha on the same day. All movements and preparations were thoroughly camouflaged; all marching was done at night. Air coverage was provided by fighters under Col. Mölders, who placed his landing fields directly behind the first echelon."*

On July 9 our 187th Division counter-attacked on the western bank of the Dnieper and knocked the nazis out of Dashkovka, Barsuki Station and Novy Bykhov by the end of the day.

However the fighting around Bykhov yielded us nothing.

We counter-attacked in two columns. But the left column jumped off several hours late. Our advance was slowed down by enemy machine-gun fire, the platoons dug in, and at the end of the day they withdrew again to the eastern bank of the Dnieper. This was the location picked by Guderian for the 24th Panzer Corps to cross the Dnieper. The panzer force was assuming its initial positions when our infantry counter-attacked. Small wonder we were flung back, for the enemy had vastly superior strength.

In the latter half of the day a nazi infantry group of ten motor vehicles and some 50 motorcycles was spotted near Tsirkovichi, Barsuki and Boshlyaki. The Commander

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 152.

of the 61st Infantry Corps ordered the 53rd Division to send a rifles battalion to surround and destroy the group with the assistance of the 110th Infantry Division.

At 10.30 a.m. on July 10, the 10th Motorised and 4th Panzer Divisions of the 24th Panzer Corps began forcing the Dnieper at Barsuki, Borkolabovo and south of Bykhov after a strong air and artillery bombardment of our defences in the sector between Dashkovka and Bykhov. By 13.00 hours a few panzer groups and armoured vehicles managed to break through our front line. An hour later a battalion of nazi infantry, with tanks and armoured vehicles, captured Sledyuki village and began spreading out to south and north east. South of Stary Bykhov, where the enemy had also managed to cross the river, the nazis captured Sidorovichi. At the same time, an enemy landing force gained a foothold at Kostinka and Makhovo. The blow was struck chiefly against our 187th Division of the 45th Infantry Corps, which was stretched thinly on a long front.

In the evening, units of the 45th Corps and sub-units hastily taken from trains arriving at Chaussy Station were deployed to the area for a new counter-attack. We were eager to close the gap. Then we found out the enemy was bringing up new strength. Our Army Commander had no reserves and was compelled to rush battalions from other sections to seal the break-through; he also moved in the fatigued 137th Division, which had arrived on foot.

Our counter-attack had little success. The enemy clung to the towns and villages he had already captured. Subsequently, the Army kept trying to close the breach, using newly arriving units of the 20th Infantry Corps commanded by Mj. Gen. Stepan Fremen (114th, 132nd and 160th divisions). Sent into battle as they detrained, the scattered troops were unable to alter the situation.

On the following day, July 11, we continued battling the enemy, who was crossing the Dnieper and consolidating on the eastern bank.

The enemy directed his main effort against the 53rd Division in the sector of the 61st Corps. Two nazi battalions tried to cross the Dnieper north of Shklov at 7 a.m., but were driven back by gunfire. After a long artillery and air bombardment, the nazis managed to lay a pontoon bridge near Yanovo and send across several infantry sub-

units with panzers. Our 53rd Division took a bad pounding but hung on to the Dnieper bank between Shklov and Zarechye.

Somewhat south of Gorodok, in the sector of the 223rd Infantry Regiment near Avgustov, two enemy companies with panzers crashed through. They were scattered in a bold counter-attack, but by the evening the nazis succeeded in gaining a foothold on the eastern bank all the same. The fighting continued throughout the night and the morning of July 12. In the Pleshchitsa area something like a battalion of nazis also crossed the Dnieper, but a counter-attack restored the situation.

That day the nazis were inactive in the sector of the 110th Division. Nothing but reconnaissance groups operated against the 172nd Division.

A battalion of the 388th Regiment, sent along the western bank of the Dnieper to Barsuki Station in order to cut off an eventual enemy withdrawal, reached the forest south of Saltanovka in the afternoon of July 11, where it was halted by organised enemy fire from Mezhusyalka. A battalion of the 747th Regiment which we sent to the Sidorovichi area to annihilate the enemy there, was involved in a savage clash.

All day long on July 11, units of the 45th Corps battled nazi troops that had crossed to the eastern bank of the Dnieper. However, Corps Commander Magon's efforts to destroy the enemy were unsuccessful. The nazis held Sidorovichi and Sledyuki securely, and endeavoured to exploit their success in the northern, eastern and south eastern directions. For all this the divisions of the 45th Corps still held their original lines and were preparing to counter-attack the following morning jointly with the 137th Division.

On July 12 our air force went into action at last, for the 11th Air Division under twice Hero of the Soviet Union Lt.-Gen. Grigory Kravchenko was put under the 13th Army's command. In the course of the day our planes destroyed the crossing at Barsuki Station. They also attacked enemy gun concentrations at Borkolabovo. The pilots reported direct hits. Fires were spotted. In the air fights Soviet planes downed one Heinkel-111.

In the night on July 11-12 units of the 148th and 187th

divisions were active in order to fatigue the enemy. They were then to mount the main attack in the morning against Sidorovich and Borkolabovo with the objective of wiping out enemy forces on the eastern bank of the Dnieper. The air force was instructed to block approaching enemy reserves and destroy all crossings at Barsuki Station, Borkolabovo and Stary Bykhov.

A reinforced infantry battalion of the 747th Regiment, 172nd Division, was ordered to advance from Slobodka southward along the highway. Its mission was to annihilate opposing enemy troops and reach the Polka River. Subsequently, the battalion was to advance on Sledyuki, clearing the forest of nazis west of the Mogilev Gomel highway. The 292nd Regiment reinforced by artillery was ordered to advance on Sidorovich from the western edge of the forest at Staraya Mileyevka, co-ordinating its operation with the 747th Regiment. The two regiments were to capture the park and eastern outskirt of Sidorovich, and then to advance along the highway to Sledyuki, clearing the forest east of the railway.

A reinforced battalion of the 160th Division was dispatched to capture Priberezhnye village and reach the highway, which it was to defend from west and south. In the meantime, a battalion of the 496th Regiment was to move from its initial position in a forest east of Perekladovich, knock the nazis out of Perekladovich and advance on Sledyuki, co-operating with units of the 187th Division advancing from south and east. The 137th Division had to assemble in the Slobodka-Staraya Mileyevka area by 15.00 hours on July 12 and stand by to attack on receipt of special orders.

The 13th Army HQ had planned to mount the counter-attack at 4.00 hours on July 12, but the Commander of the 45th Corps insisted on putting it off to 7.00 hours, because his troops were not yet ready. Lt.-Gen. Remizov, Commander of the Army, decided to go to the Corps Commander's CP and assume personal control of the battle. At 7.00 hours the vehicles in which he and his aides were travelling were ambushed by a nazi raiding party near Davydovich. The general suffered five wounds, but was saved. On July 14 Lt.-Gen. Vasily Gerasimonko assumed command of the 13th Army in his stead.

The above plan, as you see, was a thorough one. This was an indication that operational planning at 13th Army HQ was of a fairly high standard.

At 7.00 hours, the units began the attack --a battalion of the 747th Regiment north of Sidorovichi and a battalion of the 364th Regiment on Perekladovichi. However, nazi panzers counter-attacked and pushed the battalion of the 747th back. The panzers then dashed off in a southerly direction, met no resistance in the Sledyuki area, turned north-east and reached the Davydovichi-Izhichnik line. The units of the 137th Division advancing on Sidorovichi faced south and by 16.00 hours, jointly with the 498th Regiment of Mj.-Gen. Sergei Biryuzov's 132nd Division, took up positions along the Lipets-Kutiya-Alexandrov-Usuzhek line. Their ultimate task was to reach the line running from Koloniya through Grudinovka to Krasnitsa by the end of July 12 and make contact with units holding the Slobodka-Sidorovichi-Perekladovichi line.

On the following day, July 13, units of the 45th Corps engaged the enemy who had broken through towards Bykhov and was clinging to the eastern bank of the Dnieper at a number of points.

After ten days of continuous fighting the 187th Division, which had held a front of 70 kilometres, was badly mauled and no longer constituted an effective unit. However, scattered sections of it continued to hold the nazis at bay. A combined force consisting of the 236th Infantry Regiment and a number of smaller units of of the 187th Division held a line along the southern bank of the Ukhlyast River from Podlipovka to its confluence with the Dnieper and farther along the eastern bank of the Dnieper to Novy Bykhov.

The operational group of the 45th Corps Commander, stationed on the Grudinovka state farm, and another combined unit were surrounded by the enemy. Our troops parried nazi attacks, destroyed several panzers, and began to withdraw towards Maly Osoverts. But Divisional Commander Magon and his men failed to break out of the nazi ring in the course of the day. A sudden night attack was decided on to divert the nazis and help him out. The diversion did indeed give Magon and his units a chance to crash the nazi line in the afternoon of July 14.

Two regiments of the 132nd and one regiment of the 137th divisions, 20th Infantry Corps, attempted an attack from the Makhovo-Dubrovka Volkovich Usuzhek line at 5.30 a.m. on July 13, but were counter-attacked and driven back.

To sum up, the efforts of the 13th Army to restore the situation along its front on the eastern bank of the Dnieper proved unsuccessful.

Some of the units displayed extreme courage. The staffs did a lot of good work. But there was a dearth of information about the strength and the intentions of the enemy. Many of the counter-attacks were mounted in wrong directions. They ran headlong into advancing enemy panzer wedges, rather than hit the flanks. All too often, we attacked points where the enemy had his strongest posts. The successful Soviet attacks, on the other hand, were not exploited due to lack of fresh strength or for fear of encirclement. The shortage of tanks and the extremely slim air support were still a substantial handicap.

The situation in the sector held by the 61st Corps had also grown precarious. The enemy sent motorised infantry into a breach towards Shklov. The nazi force advanced in two columns from Gorki on Lenino and Gory. The 53rd Division was encircled by the nazis and all communications with it were cut. The 110th and 172nd divisions continued to hold their line. Attempts were made to localise the nazi break through in the Shklov area. The 1st Motorised Infantry Division set out from Stepakovo and the 20th Mechanised Corps from Sukhari to cut off advanced enemy columns from the main nazi force in order to annihilate them.

Here is how Mj.-Gen. Bakunin, Commander of the 61st Corps, described the situation:

"The enemy air force, artillery and mortars assaulted the sector south of Orsha, Kopys and Shklov in strength in the morning of July 11. By the end of the day they had squashed the right flank of the 53rd Division, crossed the river at Kopys and penetrated three to five kilometres into the divisional defence area. Powerful air raids and the artillery and mortar fire were resumed in the morning of July 12. Panzers raced towards Yakovlevichi and Chornoye, but were stopped on the Lohva bank by units of our 137th

Division. The enemy was held in check there until the end of the day.

"Nazi air raids on the 53rd Division were extremely vicious all day long, so vicious in fact that the division commander said to me over the phone the nazis seemingly intended to hammer his men into the ground. 'But we won't budge all the same,' he added.

"The Corps artillery and all the guns of the 110th and 137th divisions kept up a sporadic fire, inflicting losses on the enemy. The Corps artillery, which bombarded enemy concentrations at river crossings, did particularly good work.

"In the evening of July 12 the Commander of the 13th Army informed me that the 20th Mechanised Corps would come to Gorodishche under my command. He instructed me to engage the Corps at Kopys and Orsha in order to subdue nazi resistance and restore the combat lines of the 53rd and 137th divisions. The Corps was to prevent nazi landings on the eastern bank of the Dnieper. In the meantime, all through July 13, a large force of panzers supported by planes, guns and mortars, pounded the right flank of the 53rd and left flank of the 137th divisions, crashed through and swarmed towards Dubrovno.

"In the evening of July 13 Mj.-Gen. Nikolai Vedeneyev, Commander of the 20th Mechanised Corps, called on me at my CP to report that his troops were assembling at Gorodishche, Dubrovka and Ordut. He said they would be ready to jump off in the morning of July 15 and added that his Corps had no tanks.

"In the next three days the enemy pushed the 137th Division back to the Boyari-Barzdovka-Yarmolovka line. Communications with the right flank regiment broke down. The division commander reported that his troops had suffered extremely heavy casualties. Towards the end of the day on July 16, the 137th withdrew after a vicious battle to the Basya River, holding the bank from Maslaki to Var-kovo. The badly depleted 53rd Division retreated to Okunevka-Gorodets. I sent out my reserves to assume initial positions for the offensive of the 20th Mechanised Corps along a line running from Gorodishche to Knyazhitsy.

"By this time communications with 13th Army Headquarters were cut. Neither did I have contact with my left

neighbour. My supply base, Tyomny Les, was in nazi hands. The 20th Mechanised Corps and two regiments of the 110th Division assumed the offensive from Gorodishche-Knyazhitsy in the morning of July 17 towards Kopy and Orsha. The attack got off to a good start. The troops reached Yakovlevichi and Printsevka. There, they were met by a large force of panzers and infantry, stopped and compelled to retreat in the evening of July 20 to Pervomai-Okunevka-Knyazhitsy. Massive air raids and panzer attacks thinned our ranks greatly.

"A force of panzers smashed through to Gorodishche. The nazis headed south, creating a threat to the 20th Mechanised Corps CP and to our own. Luckily, our Corps artillery had firing positions in the area and used concrete-piercing shells to destroy several panzers at point-blank range. Some of the panzers turned north and were wiped out by gunfire and anti-tank raiders, who made skilful use of incendiary bottles and bundles of hand-grenades. Our troops managed to detain the enemy along the Gorodishche-Knyazhitsy line.

"The enemy suffered telling losses in manpower and arms in those three days of heavy fighting. Divisional commanders reported that some 200 panzers, numerous lorries and motorcycles were damaged or destroyed, and that the enemy had many casualties. Prisoners were taken.

"By the morning of July 21 troops of the 61st Corps took up defence positions. The 20th Mechanised Corps held a line running from Chernyavka through Ruditsy and Ordats to Gorodishche. The 110th Infantry Division held Gorodishche, Knyazhitsy, Pleshchitsy and Mostock, while the remnants of the 137th Infantry Division were positioned in Sukhari.

"Somewhere around July 16, I was visited at my command post by Col. Gluzdovsky. He reported that he had brought the 1st Moscow Motorised Infantry Division, or rather what was left of it, out of an enemy pocket. The division now had no more than 1,200 men with light fire-arms and a small stock of ammunition. I asked the Colonel whether his men could undertake an assignment. He said they could. I ordered him to straddle the highway from Chaussy and Slavgorod, take charge of a battalion and the guns of the left-flank regiment of the 110th Division, as-

sume defence positions from Vilnitsy to Dary and cover the flank and rear of the 172nd Division."

In a nutshell, the main forces assigned to parry the nazi thrust—the 20th Mechanised Corps and the 1st Motorised Infantry Division, bled white in previous battles—had been unable to fulfil their assignment.

We thus fell down on the plan of our command to cut off the nazi motorised infantry from the panzer forces that had gone ahead, both in the Shklov and the Bykhov sectors.

All the same, the effort was not altogether lost. Our troops had accumulated some valuable experience, and made the nazis suffer some severe shocks.

Guderian wrote:

"At 18.15 hours on July 11, I set out to visit the 46th Panzer Corps at Shklov. . . . I arrived at 21.30 hours. Heavy gunfire and repeated enemy air bombings of the bridge-heads held by the 10th Panzer Division made the river crossing more difficult than in the 47th Panzer Corps sector between Orsha and Shklov. The bridge held by the SS 'Reich' Division had also been damaged by enemy planes."*

In his entries dated July 13, Guderian said:

"Ivily firing in the southerly direction indicated that the Great Germany Infantry Regiment was engaged in a heavy battle. The Regiment was assigned to cover our flank on the Mogilev side. At night came a plea for help: the Great Germany Regiment had used up all its ammunition. Unaccustomed to battles in Russia, the Regiment asked for fresh ammunition.

"Desperate Russian counter-attacks began on July 13. From Gomel some 20 divisions opposed the right flank of the panzer group, while attacks were mounted from Mogilev in southerly and south-easterly directions and from Orsha to the south of the invested Russian bridgeheads. All these actions were obviously designed to frustrate our successful Dnieper crossing. . . .

"On July 14, I ordered the 46th Corps and the SS Reich Division to advance on Gorki and set out on their heels. The 10th Panzer Division reached Gorki and Mstislavl after

heavy fighting and regrettable losses, particularly of artillery.”*

By July 16 the Soviet 13th Army was invested on both flanks and was menaced by total encirclement. The Army's front within the immense pincers was also breached in several directions.

By that time our 4th Army had abandoned Propoisk (Slavgorod) and exposed the flank of the 13th Army. Lt.-Gen. Vasily Gerasimenko decided to withdraw his troops, but could not reach the subordinate staffs and had to waive his order. Previous instructions to hold fast remained in force. Army Headquarters removed to Krichev. A staff officer of Army IIQ was summoned to Front IIQ to report on the situation. We decided to defend Mogilev and withdraw the rest of the troops to the Pronya River.

Let us now return to the 172nd Infantry Division, which was assigned the defence of Mogilev. This heroic force deserves as much gratitude for what it did as the gallant defenders of the Brest Fortress, because it stood its ground in flimsy field fortifications built with the assistance of the local population for all of 23 days, containing Guderian's pauger armada. It did not abandon the city until the front had rolled back 100 km from the Byelorussian Madrid, as Mogilev was quickly christened by its valorous defenders.

I was told about the division and its glorious record by veterans of the Mogilev Battle, who held a reunion in that city in April 1963.

The 172nd Division was formed in 1939 out of the 84th Division and was stationed near Tula in the town of Novomoskovsk. Shortly before the war, the division went to a camp near Tula for summer training.

By this time, some changes had been made in its command. Col. Kreizer, who was put in command when the division was formed, was admitted to the Academy of the General Staff. He was replaced by Mj.-Gen. Mikhail Romanov in April 1941. First word about the outbreak of the war was received when the men were about to celebrate the opening of their summer camp. The units were lined up on the parade ground. The serried ranks heard the grim

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 158-59



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government announcement of the treacherous nazi attack. An order was instantly issued to return to winter quarters, where the division would be brought up to wartime strength and prepared to leave for the front. On June 26 the first echelon entrained westward. As we have already related, units of the division concentrated in and around Mogilev between June 28 and July 3, taking charge of the fortifications.

The divisional commander and his staff reached the Mogilev area towards the close of June 30.

"Romanov and I went to the Regional Military Commissariat," the former Divisional Commissar, Col. Leonty Chernichenko, writes in his memoirs. "It was the busiest place in the city, co-ordinating the work of Party, government and military services in Mogilev Region and the city proper. The industries and part of the population had been evacuated by then.

"In the office of Colonel Voyevodin, the Regional Military Commissar, we were introduced to functionaries of the local Party and government bodies. We met the secretaries of the regional and Party committees, and members of the regional and city Soviets of Working People's Deputies. The Commissar briefed us on the progress made in fortify-

ing the Mogilev area. The Colonel also said he could let our division have 10,000 litres of incendiary fuel, which the Command of the Western Front had given him to fight panzers. We had no such fuel. That day we distributed it to the troops and began instructing the men in its use."

Some authentic facts about the defence of Mogilev are contained in the memoirs of Colonel Alexander Karpinsky, Chief of Staff of the 172nd Division. They show, like the other sources, that a defence perimeter was erected round Mogilev with a radius of up to 25 kilometres, plus a more or less wide forward zone. Its purpose was to prevent the enemy from lunging into the city in stride or breaking through in a manoeuvre of investment from the flanks or the rear.

This objective was set before the defenders back at the end of June, because we knew that rapid seizure of important strategic points by the nazis would wreak havoc with our plans of organising defences along the Dnieper. The regiments were so placed as to repulse panzer attacks at the most probable points of assault and secure close co-operation between infantry and artillery. A thorough plan was worked out to cover the most important objectives and combat positions from the air. Anti-aircraft artillery had specific orders to protect airfields, railway stations, bridges, staff headquarters, gun positions and fortifications held by the infantry.

All this entailed strenuous effort by all men and officers, who had to face up to a superior enemy force without any tanks and relying solely on regimental and divisional artillery. The only unit the division had attached to it was the 601st Howitzer Regiment. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the left flank had very poor coverage and that the Luftwaffe had full control of the air. However, as Karpinsky attests, the efforts of the defending units, the divisional staff, and the divisional, Army and Front engineers yielded considerable fruit. The Command of the Front, too, took a lively part in preparing the defences. An effective anti-tank perimeter was built with strong support points.

Mj. Gen. Romanov, who acted on the instructions of the Army Commander and the Commander of the 61st Corps, decided to disposition his troops along the western bank

of the Dnieper. The regiments were assigned sectors of defence. The 514th Infantry Regiment under Lt.-Col. Sergei Bonich (Chief of Staff Mj. Muravyov), held a line from Zatishye to Tishovka, supported by the 493rd Howitzer Regiment. The 388th Regiment under Colonel Kutepov was dispositioned between Tishovka and Buinichi, supported by the 340th Light Artillery Regiment. The 747th Regiment under Lt.-Col. Alexander Sheheglov was in the second echelon on the eastern bank of the Dnieper. It had the support of the 601st Howitzer Regiment. The 341st Separate Anti-Aircraft Battalion was dispositioned in the sector of the 388th Regiment, covering an airfield and a bridge across the Dnieper.

A mobile motorised battalion of the 514th Regiment, commanded by Sr. Lt. Volchok, was assigned for reconnaissance. It was ordered to reconnoitre the enemy at the approaches to the line of defence. The same assignment was also given to the separate reconnaissance battalion under Capt. Metelsky. The two battalions went into action on July 3.

On July 4 the Commander of the 61st Infantry Corps visited the command post of the 172nd Infantry Division. He looked into the situation and approved the measures taken by the divisional command.

"On July 4 and 5," Col. Karpinsky says in his memoirs, "our forward units engaged an advanced nazi reconnaissance troop in our forward zone. The nazis belonged to the 24th and 46th Panzer Corps of Guderian's panzer group, which had crossed the Berezina and occupied Borisov and Bobruisk.

"Between July 5 and 8, inclusive, the fighting became more furious. Nazi panzers tried to capture Mogilev on the march, but their thrusts were blocked. The enemy suffered heavy losses in manpower and armour.

"At first, there was no limit to nazi foolhardiness. In the first attack the panzers rolled at our line with hatches lifted and observers looking out, as on parade. But after we had destroyed several dozen panzers with our anti-tank guns, hand-grenades and incendiary bottles, the enemy no longer dared to make these 'parade-ground panzer shows'. Panzers blazed like bonfires. One day we hit and burned 39 panzers. They made a cemetery of charred

hulks. This shows how hard fought the defensive battles were."

A brief lull set in round Mogilev after July 8. The nazis had failed to crack our defences in a head-on attack and began probing for weak points in the neighbouring sectors. Information came to hand from the reconnaissance. Volchok's battalion reported jubilantly that it had destroyed several panzers at Belynichi beyond the Drut River. The men had made excellent use of their anti-tank guns, and of bundles of hand-grenades, as well as incendiary bottles.

"We told the men of our division about the exploit of that courageous battalion," Col. Chernichenko related. "Also, we issued a leaflet, 'Set Fire to Panzers'. The leaflet contained accounts by the boldest and most skilful soldiers who had engaged panzers in single combat. All units learned of their experience. Someone suggested forming squads of anti-tankers. Such volunteer teams were formed in every regiment. They also admitted volunteers from among the local population, who knew the terrain. The squads ambushed panzer units and did a lot of damage to them. Night raids were particularly effective."

"On July 9," Chernichenko continued, "Division Commander Romanov and I were summoned to Corps Commander General Bakunin and Brigade Commissar Voronov. Bakunin briefed us on the general situation and told us about the developments in the Borisov area, where the 1st Moscow Motorised Infantry Division had repulsed enemy panzers and inflicted heavy losses on the nazis, but was forced to retreat in face of superior enemy strength. Its commander, Yakov Kreizer, whom we all knew well, was wounded in the arm. General Bakunin said to us: 'Kreizer has destroyed some 100 panzers. That is very good, but you will have to do better than that. Large panzer forces are advancing on Mogilev from Minsk and Bobruisk. You will probably have to deal with several hundred panzers. Get ready for it!'

"The Corps Commander and Commissar commended the units of the 172nd Division for their conduct in battle, and we were told our best men were up for decorations. On August 9, 1941, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. conferred decorations on a large group of Mogilev defenders. Mj.-Gen. Mikhail Romanov was decorated with



A. V. Shcheglov

the Order of the Red Banner. Also decorated was Commander of the 388th Regiment Semyon Kutepov, and others."

What General Bakunin had told his subordinates from the information he had received from Front Headquarters materialised all too quickly. After a long-range artillery shoot, coupled with an air pounding, the nazis mounted a fierce attack along the entire line held by the division on July 11. Ceaseless fighting continued in the divisional sector on July 12 and 13. Our defences were some 25 kilometres deep. At some points the enemy drove in wedges 16 km deep. But General Romanov made good use of his reserves, shuffled his forces, and organised successive counter-attacks. The enemy was flung back and the defence line was straightened.

Leonty Chernichenko revealed in his account how more or less detailed information about the fighting at Mogilev reached the nation. On the day the enemy was flung back, Moscow correspondents came to Mogilev. They saw 39 gutted Guderian panzers. A photograph of them appeared in the *Izvestia*.

Having forced the Dnieper south of Bykhov, the nazis began expanding their springboard near Sidorovichy on July 13. This was a challenge to the 747th Regiment. The

enemy noticed that our defences had been weakened and resolved to cut off the units dispositioned in the city from units defending Lupolovo Station. The 747th engaged the panzers on the Orsha-Gomel highway along the eastern bank of the Dnieper.

I had the good fortune of talking with the former Regimental Commissar Kuznetsov and the then Secretary of the Regimental Party Bureau, Monakhov. I also corresponded with the regiment's former commander, Shcheglov. They provided me with many interesting facts about the gallant fighting around Lupolovo Station.

The 747th Regiment had had some combat experience, because it had fought in Finland round Kandalaksha. At the outset, the regiment was in a more favourable position than the 388th and 514th regiments, who held positions on the western bank of the Dnieper and were the first to face the head-on nazi thrust. Moreover, the 747th, which held a ten-kilometre sector, was supported by the 601st Howitzer Regiment. Also, the Army's anti-aircraft regiment was stationed in its sector, and this, too, added muscle to the defence of Mogilev's outskirts. On the densely wooded heights of the area, the soldiers and the Lupolovo population had dug trenches and ditches, a number of bunkers, an anti-tank ditch, traps and pits; log gun emplacements, blocks and pillars had been built and minefields were laid. Centres of resistance were organised and the forward zone was fortified. Wherever possible, timber obstacles were erected and observation posts were built in the treetops. Barbed wire was stretched across the most menaced sectors. Barricades were erected in Lupolovo itself, and all its stone buildings were fortified. Gun emplacements were judiciously dispositioned in depth.

"We reconnoitred from the very beginning," Kuznetsov wrote, "assigning a mobile raiding group to infiltrate the enemy rear on instructions of Lt.-Gen. Eremenko, Deputy Commander of the Western Front. The raiders operated fairly successfully. They captured two nazi officers, who gave us valuable information about the enemy's strength and intentions. Among other things, they told us that the troops at Mogilev were of the 24th Panzer Corps and that their own advanced sub-units had been sent out to reconnoitre our defences."



V. F. Kuznetsov

At that time, we had little or no authentic information about the enemy, and what the captured nazi officers revealed was of the utmost value to us. I believe it was the first time we learned about the strength of the Guderian group and its 24th Panzer Corps. It turned out later that the division had to deal with that particular corps, or, more precisely, with its 3rd panzer and 10th mechanised divisions.

The 747th Regiment prepared assiduously, like the rest of the division, to repulse panzer attacks. Apart from the artillery, it had learned to use incendiary bottles. The men trained diligently in the use of this weapon, which they nicknamed "pocket artillery". Kuznetsov related that General Romanov, who inspected the regiment before the fighting began, had commended the regimental command for forming anti-tanker squads. The incendiary bottles, an effective weapon if skilfully used, proved their worth in repulsing the nazi armoured thrusts.

The state of affairs as regards arms and vehicles was far from satisfactory in the regimental sector. There was only one Soviet-made submachine gun in the regiment, though there were several dozen captured German tommy-guns. All the regiment had was five armoured cars. Tanks were conspicuous by their absence. The battle in the sector of

the 747th, destined to play an important part in the defence of Mogilev, began on July 10 with a ferocious enemy artillery bombardment. Soon after, forward enemy units, chiefly motorcyclists armed with heavy machine guns, attacked the regimental security guard, which was 10 km in advance of the main force in a little wood beside Nedashevo village. Our men stood their ground firmly, inflicted considerable damage with their fire and counter-attacks, and made the highly-touted motorcyclists turn tail. The motorcyclists were followed by infantry, and the infantry, too, was belted, leaving behind several dozen men killed and wounded. A non-commissioned officer was taken prisoner. He revealed that the motorcyclists were advancing on Chaussy, while the main force of his division was building bridges across the Dnieper. Some troops, he said, had begun to cross the river. The offensive, he added, was conducted by two columns, one of which had run into the forward regimental guard unit.

As I have already said, savage fighting broke out near Sidorovich. Two enemy regiments with armoured vehicles and panzers were attacking there, and finally captured the village.

By decision of the 13th Army Commander a counter-attack was organised on Sidorovich and Slobodka. A contingent of the 747th Regiment took part in it, consisting of a rifles battalion of trainees from the regimental school, two regimental artillery batteries, and a battalion of the 493rd Artillery Regiment. The divisional reconnaissance battalion also took part.

Major Gennady Zlatoustovsky, Chief of Staff of the 747th, was put in command. His comrades, Kuznetsov and Monakhov, who knew him well, described him as a fine Red Army officer. He had developed as commander before the war, and was a thoughtful and unusually industrious staff officer who could perform his difficult duties efficiently without rest or sleep for several consecutive days. He was a knowledgeable and competent commander in every respect, a man who enjoyed prestige and affection among superior officers, as well as subordinates. In carrying out orders, he displayed initiative, imagination, will-power and tenacity, and had a knack of leading people effectively in the most complicated situations.

This was why he was picked to take charge of the troops that were to make an audacious counter-attack on a superior enemy force. He made his appearance, dressed smartly in a new uniform, summoned the officers and explained their specific tasks. Then he visited all the sub-units, spoke to the men, and brought home to them the importance of their operation. Political officer Beruk, instructor of the regiment's propaganda department, was appointed as his commissar.

In the night on July 11-12 Zlatoustovsky's unit set out in two columns along two different roads towards the southern edge of the forest, the initial counter-attack positions. A small nazi security detachment was flung back. Our guns and mortars opened up against the nazi motorised infantry in Sidorovich village. The companies emerged from the forest, assumed battle formation and advanced. The nazis did not expect the assault, and lost their heads. Our shells burst in their midst. Enemy vehicles and gasoline carriers were set aflame. Nazi armoured cars and panzers, sprayed by the burning gasoline from exploding gasoline tanks, caught fire. The Soviet infantry burst into the Sidorovich and Slobodka villages, making short work of the nazis. The enemy fled back to the Dnieper, leaving dozens of bodies in the field, more than 30 vehicles and gasoline carriers, numerous crippled guns and gutted armoured cars and panzers. The commander and commissar of the Soviet attack unit reported this to regimental headquarters. But under subsequent enemy pressure the unit withdrew. It straddled the Gomel highway and set up a perimeter defence on the edge of the forest north of Slobodka and Nedashevo.

The following morning the rumble of nazi panzers was heard on three sides. German bombers appeared overhead. Enemy guns and mortars opened fire, and a fierce nazi infantry and panzer attack began. The bombers dropped their load on the edge of the forest, where the command post of the unit and the firing positions of our artillery were situated.

Eyewitness accounts have enabled us to reproduce the course of events, if only partially. Before the counter-attack, our gunners fired at the panzers and infantry from close quarters. Three panzers, hit by Cap. Trofimov's

battery, caught fire. In the meantime, some ten panzers were rolling in open formation towards the trenches of the regimental school trainees. The first three rumbled over the slit trenches. They were allowed to pass, then incendiary bottles were hurled out of the trenches at them. The panzers burst into flames. Their crews, who tried to abandon the burning vehicles, were shot down. The rest of the panzers turned tail.

Instantly, the enemy infantry began to retreat. It could not withstand the withering fire and the audacious assault of our trainees and scouts. The first to counter-attack was Lt. Zinakov's company. Zinakov and political officer Sklyarenko ran at the head of their men, urging the company on. The neighbouring company followed suit. Enemy shells and mines fell in clusters. Nazi tommy-gun and machine-gun fire became more intensive. The enemy was bent on frustrating our counter-attack at all costs, but did not succeed. The attack developed splendidly. Unable to withstand the bayonet charge, the enemy fled.

The nazi infantry evaded a hand-to-hand battle and rolled back under heavy fire, leaving behind many dead, as well as damaged and charred panzers, guns and mortars.

Commander Zlatoustovsky was seriously wounded in the arm, but stayed in the thick of the fighting, although the Commander of the 1st Battalion had come to deputise for him. The breathing space that ensued was used to good advantage in fortifying the newly-captured positions, erecting fire posts and reconnoitring enemy strength. The manoeuvre of the sub-units and arrival of reserves were not noticed by the enemy. We made the most of the wooded terrain and the nazis had no idea of our strength and weapons in the area.

In the afternoon, scouts reported that the enemy was poised for another attack, having concentrated panzers and infantry on the western edge of the forest at Sidorovichi. Very soon, the nazis began an artillery preparation, after which they mounted an attack with 40 panzers and up to a regiment of infantry. They advanced in two columns—along a village road from Sidorovichi towards Nedashevo and along the Gomel highway. The panzers, followed by infantry, fired on the move, advancing cautiously to test

the daring and strength of the defenders. Enemy pressure mounted gradually. The Soviet troops stood their ground firmly, but the enemy sent in 10 panzers to breach the juncture between two companies and the fighting shifted into depth. Bundles of hand-grenades and incendiary bottles were flung at the panzers. Anti-tank guns opened up, and a battery under Lt. Kosorukov was sent to close the breach. Four panzers were damaged in the first salvo. A shell splinter wounded Kosorukov, but he continued to direct his men. Having failed to gain an advantage, the enemy retreated, fighting back savagely every inch of the way. The battle did not subside. Nazi panzers and infantry broke through the line on the right flank, defended by the trainees of the regimental school. The panzers began ironing the trenches. The scene was enveloped in clouds of dust and smoke. The tension climbed to breaking point. Mj. Zlatoustovsky sent an anti-tank battery out of his reserve to help the trainees. The men put their guns into position for direct laying and struck the enemy suddenly and swiftly. The nazi attack collapsed.

Special credit in this clash goes to the machine gun company of the 1st Battalion under Sr. Lt. Bordun, a splendid leader of men. The Lieutenant was shell-shocked and wounded at the height of the fighting. When he regained his senses he heard someone shout that the gunner was killed. Oblivious of pain, Bordun crept forward and took hold of the machine gun. Nazis were running down a hill-lock, shouting loudly. When they were 10 paces away Bordun let go with a long and accurate burst of fire, but was soon wounded by a grenade splinter. The enemy came closer. The Lieutenant summoned the remnants of his strength and flung three hand-grenades at the nazis in quick succession. The last of the three exploded close by. Several enemy soldiers paid with their lives for attempting to capture him alive. The hero died gloriously.

The 7th Company, which straddled the Gomel-Mogilev highway, was badly outnumbered, but fought a gallant battle on the right of the regimental school, together with the division's reconnaissance battalion. When the nazis attempted to break through along the highway to Mogilev, the commander ordered his troops to counter-attack. A nazi motorcycle company turned tail. It rolled back some

300 metres. However, the commander was killed by machine gun fire near the road.

Private Krylov tore into the enemy position in a captured armoured car, rode roughshod over an enemy cannon, and shot down its crew. He ignored shouted offers of surrender and kept on firing until he exhausted his ammunition.

Men of the 717th Regiment performed many other no less heroic feats in this their first serious battle, which lasted uninterruptedly for all of ten hours. Though they had no tank support of their own, the soldiers fought bravely against enemy panzers, using bundles of hand grenades and bottles of incendiary fuel. Some 20 panzers, 30 motor vehicles and petrol carriers, many guns and mortars were damaged or burned. Hundreds of enemy soldiers and officers were killed. Zlatoustovsky's unit suffered considerable losses and was compelled to retreat under cover of night to the forward zone, leaving a guard unit on the roads.

The regiment did substantial damage to the enemy also in the fighting for Dashkovka, where it co-operated with other units of the division.

I might recount the following episode. On Sundays the enemy usually mounted attacks somewhat later than on other days. Our men suddenly heard the sound of motors. Some of the planes were headed for Mogilev, and some for Lupolovo. Our anti-aircraft guns fired on the raiders. The men joined in with rifles and machine guns. That Sunday, seven enemy planes were brought down in flames. The joy we experienced over it was greater than any other during the Mogilev defence.

One of the downed planes was the sinister Focke Wolf, a twin fuselage reconnaissance plane, which had been causing us considerable trouble. In it we discovered two sacks of leaflets urging our troops to lay down their arms.

The pilot of one of the downed Nazi bombers bailed out. It was a woman. Asked why she was bombing a city and its peaceful population, she replied, "What's the difference between your population and you? All of you are Soviets, and our Führer has ordered us to exterminate Soviets."

Our strength was gradually faltering. The enemy was building up pressure on the regiment. The situation became

near disastrous when he reached the area around Lupolovo Station.

Fierce fighting ensued. The nazis engaged two divisions in the direction of Lupolovo and made our 2nd Battalion give ground. The enemy finally captured the station. Our regimental commander ordered a counter-attack to expel him. The regimental guns gave the counter-attack what support they could. As always, members of the Communist Party were in the van. They led the rest of the soldiers into the murk of battle. Cheering, the companies ran forward. The fighting was impetuous and bloody, and culminated in a hand-to-hand clash. Faltering in face of the ferocious bayonet charge, badly harassed by Soviet gunfire, the nazis lost heart and abandoned the station. However, they regrouped and advanced once more on the Soviet positions. Fighting broke out anew. Several times the station changed hands. Both sides suffered heavy losses. The 747th Regiment moved in all available strength. This was an hour of glory for our men. They displayed striking patriotism. Members of the supply troops and medical units took the place of the killed. Lightly wounded men returned to the ranks from the medical aid posts, and with them came the doctors and nurses. Though wounded, nurse Nina Potapova climbed over the top with the rest of the men in a counter-attack. Regimental Commander Lt.-Col. Shecheglov controlled the battle skilfully. He was always on the spot whenever the situation became critical. Party members and political officers encouraged the men by word and deed.

By July 25 the enemy had tightened the ring still more and the 747th was partly cut off from the rest of the division. Some of its sub-units crossed the river to Mogilev and took part in the fighting for the city. Others withdrew deeper into the forest, in the direction of Sukhari. Division Headquarters' wire communications with the regiment were cut. The enemy occupied the suburb of Lupolovo.

In the summing-up, one cannot but note that the 747th displayed extreme valour and tenacity. The Soviet people owe it deep thanks.

The situation in the sector of the 388th Infantry Regiment deteriorated disastrously at this time. The nazis attacked the positions of Capt. Abramov's battalion at Bui-nichi savagely several times a day. The battalion's

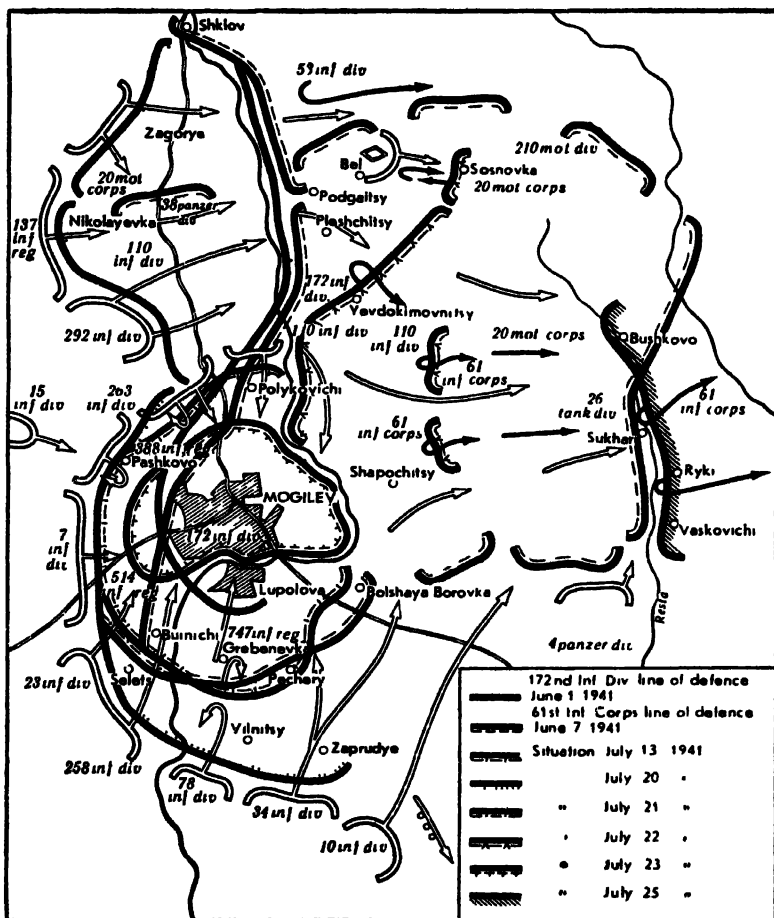
manpower was almost entirely wiped out. The commander, too, fell gallantly in battle. The fighting shifted to the second line on July 17. The enemy was held in check there, and was unable to reach the city.

The situation of the division grew more and more precarious. Eyewitnesses report that ammunition supplies were the weakest spot in the defence. Having lost hope of capturing Mogilev in stride and having suffered unexpectedly heavy losses, units of Guderian's 24th and 46th panzer corps flanked Mogilev on two sides (the 46th Corps northward and the 24th southward) and sealed the ring round the city at Chausy. The Soviet division was crowded into a narrow pocket, but continued the unequal contest through July 15 to 19. By that time, the Germans had already captured Smolensk. After his unsuccessful panzer attacks, he reverted to new tactics, using the infantry in attack, reinforced by two or three panzers. Small groups of nazi Tommy-gunsners tried to infiltrate our defences, particularly at night. They hoped to create panic in our ranks at night-time with sudden bursts of fire.

After the enemy cut off our divisional rear by capturing Chausy, the shortage of ammunition and food grew more acute. Soviet planes air-dropped the necessary matériel, but each time some of the parachutes were blown off course to enemy positions. Besides, some shells delivered with so much pain turned out to be of the wrong calibre.

On July 22 the Chief of the General Staff asked Western Front HQ for more specific information about the units defending Mogilev. Mj.-Gen. Romanov reported on the available strength and pleaded insistently for ammunition and other supplies. Front Headquarters ordered him to make bonfires at the airfield near Lupolovo to receive air drops. That night a flight of transport planes dropped supplies of ammunition and food. Some of the supplies fell in the sector held by the 747th Regiment, and some on enemy positions. At dawn, a hard-fought battle ensued for the possession of these supplies, and they were finally retrieved from the enemy. More supplies were dropped on July 24, this time in the sector of the 388th Regiment around Tishovka, near the silk factory. The division commissar attests that this was a moral, as well as material, boost.

Let me quote General Bakunin, to give an idea of what



The 61st Inf Corps of the 13th Army
Resisted Stiffly at Mogilev

the commanding officer, who controlled the fighting in general, saw and felt.

"I must commend the commanders of the units and sub-units of my division," Bakunin wrote, "for they and their men fought devotedly and bravely, unsparing of their lives. Take the 388th Regiment Commander, Col. Kutepov, and Capt. Plotnikov, his chief of staff. When enemy tanks crashed the front line and headed for the CP, the headquarters personnel with Kutepov and Plotnikov at their head let the tanks pass and counter-attacked the infantry, showering the nazis with hand-grenades. The commander and chief of staff ran forward, encouraging their men and officers. The audacious counter-attack restored the positions of the battalion, which was in the regiment's second echelon.

"Col. Bonich, Commander of the 514th Regiment, acted just as bravely on several occasions.

"When enemy panzers approached his command post, Col. Mazalov, Commander of the Light Artillery Regiment, assumed command of a battery and opened fire. I could tell of many such exploits. The 102nd Division displayed wholesale heroism against superior enemy forces."

Divisional Commander Gen. Romanov acquitted himself as a skilful organiser. He controlled his units firmly and comported himself bravely in combat.

From July 21 to 26 the enemy mounted pressure to a culmination point in the northern sector of the 110th Division and the 20th Mechanised Corps, striking to squash resistance on the right flank. Panzers and infantry mounted attacks several times daily under cover of planes, guns and mortars, but failed to make a decisive break-through due to heavy losses.

The Soviet troops, the 110th Division among others, clung strongly to their positions, responding with counter attacks to every enemy lunge. Commander Khlebtsev of the 110th Division also proved to be a knowledgeable, firm and courageous general.

Bakunin says in his account that formation commanders reported to him daily, particularly after July 20, that ammunition was running low.

"The troops of the corps were completely surrounded," Gen. Bakunin writes in his concluding passage. "They were

far in the rear of the enemy, and their communications with the Higher Command were cut. After this analysis, I arrived at the conclusion that further resistance without reliable supplies would only cause still greater losses in manpower and decided to try and break out of the nazi ring.

"In the morning on July 26, I summoned the commanders to my command post to announce my tentative decision to take the troops out of the encirclement. Commander Romanov of the 172nd Infantry Division did not come, because his division was cut off from the rest of the Corps."

The Corps Commander briefed the gathering on the situation and outlined his plan of breaking out of the nazi ring. The chiefs of staffs of the divisions were to work out the plan in detail under the supervision of the Staff Chief of the 61st Corps.

The time for the break-out was set for the evening of July 27. The plan envisaged a troop manoeuvre in the general direction of Mstislavl-Roslavl by three routes. The 20th Mechanised Corps was to proceed in the van and the most battleworthy units of the 110th Infantry Division were to close the rear.

The Commander of the 172nd Infantry Division, who had no reliable contact with the Corps, also decided to attempt breaking out of the nazi ring.

In the course of these 23 days of fighting on the banks of the Dnieper and at Mogilev, the Corps displayed tenacity in defence, good organisation, bravery, endurance, courage and heroism against heavy odds. The 172nd Division, which bore the brunt of the Mogilev defence, deserves special praise.

The artillery, and doubly so the anti-tank artillery, shored up the defences splendidly.

According to the far from complete estimates of our various staffs, the toll taken in the 23 days of fighting amounted to 24 nazi planes, about 200 panzers, about 400 motorcycles, and about 500 automobiles damaged or destroyed. The nazi loss in manpower amounted to about 15,000 killed. Some 2,000 enemy soldiers and officers were taken prisoner.

To sum up, troops under Gen. Bakunin's command checked the advance of a large enemy panzer and

mechanised corps for 20-23 days on the Dnieper line and around Mogilev. Thereby, they helped greatly to stabilise the Yartsevo-Yelna-Dyatkovo front.

The defenders of Mogilev proper, men of the 172nd Division, the 425th Regiment, 110th Infantry Division, and of the detachments of local volunteers, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy in the hard-fought long-drawn and savage fighting at the approaches to the city. According to Ivan Brukhanov, former political officer of a company of the 747th Regiment, some 8,000 nazi men and officers were killed or wounded, and more than 600 taken prisoner. He made his estimate on the strength of letters and conversations with veterans of the Mogilev battle. Some 150 enemy panzers and armoured vehicles were damaged and burned, and a score of nazi planes was shot down. These figures may not be precise, but are evidently quite near the truth.

However, by July 26 resources were almost entirely exhausted, though the fighting spirit of the heavily depleted defenders was still running high. Despite terrible losses, those still in action were imbued with courage and were ready to continue the unequal battle. At this point the divisional commander realised that further defence of a narrow sector of the Dnieper line was no longer operationally important. Any further attempt at holding the positions was likely to end in the total annihilation of his troops. Ammunition and food supplies had run out. To obtain supplies was impossible. The general front had rolled back far to the east.

In the night on July 26 General Romanov called a conference at divisional HQ in city School No. 11, Menzhinsky Street. He summoned the commanders, commissars and chiefs of staff of the infantry regiments and other units. In that dark hour the division chief wanted to hold counsel with his men, to hear their opinion, to determine their mood and arrive at an agreed decision. There is sufficient testimony at hand to restore the picture of how the conference proceeded. It opened with the following communication by General Romanov.

In the morning of July 24, he said, two parliamentarians, an officer and a soldier, of the Great Germany Regiment, holding a white flag and wearing white armbands, unarmed, were brought to divisional headquarters from the



S. F. Kutepov

747th Regiment. They handed General Romanov a document addressed to the head of the Mogilev garrison and signed by the Commander of the nazi 7th Army Corps. It was an ultimatum demanding an immediate cease-fire and the surrender of the city, in which case the enemy promised indulgence to prisoners.

After learning the contents of the document through the interpreter, Romanov went on to say, he and the divisional commissar told the parliamentarians they were mistaken if they thought the defenders of Mogilev would lay down their arms. No Red Army garrison had ever surrendered to the mercy of the enemy before having exhausted all resources, he said, and the Soviet troops defending the Dnieper line at Mogilev were true to the traditions of their fathers.

After this, Romanov concluded, the ultimatum was returned to the parliamentarians and they were sent back.

Romanov asked the conference whether they approved the decision of the divisional command.

"We approve entirely," the officers said in unison.

Romanov then continued:

"We have no intention to surrender to the nazis. Being patriots of our Soviet land, we shall not disgrace ourselves.

I want to consult you about our further action. The position of our troops is tragic. They have been heavily bled, and we have no chance of reinforcing them. There are some 4,000 wounded, ammunition has run out, and food supplies are low. Though heavily outnumbered, the encircled units of our division, and the 425th Regiment of the 110th Infantry Division, the local volunteer detachments and the local militia have fought stoutly and organised audacious counter-attacks. We have suffered heavy losses. Many of our officers and men have fallen in battle, giving their lives for their country. I ask you to honour them by a minute's silence."

After this, Romanov asked his associates to speak their minds.

The first to respond was Commander Kutepov of the 388th Infantry. He said:

"The enemy has not broken our spirit. We have done what we were ordered by the Western Front Commander, and defended Mogilev. Our 388th Regiment had a difficult sector. We held the famous Saltanovka village, where Napoleon's invading troops were defeated in 1812. I think our men were worthy of their forefathers. The fighting was savage. We countered every enemy attack with an attack of our own and did much damage to the nazis. But we have been badly battered ourselves. Our main trouble was that we had no tanks to silence the enemy's guns, which mowed down our infantry. Only a few of our battalions have anything above platoon strength. What is worst, we have run out of ammunition. I suggest gathering our remaining strength and breaking out of the pocket."

Major Vasily Katyushin, acting chief of staff of the division, spoke next. He reported that the enemy was tightening the ring round Mogilev with three fresh infantry divisions. To stay on was to expose what were in effect unarmed people to annihilation. He suggested breaking out of the pocket in two directions—north and south.

Since this was the consensus, no one else asked to speak.

Summing up the conference, General Mikhail Romanov said:

"Thank you, comrades. You have fortified me in the opinion I had when I summoned the conference. I made the tentative decision to try a break, but wanted to hear

your views. Now I am firmly convinced my decision was correct."

Like the other conferees, Romanov knew the situation at first hand. In the circumstances, this decision was the only wise one to take.

At the end of the conference, the division commander read the following order:

"1. The enemy has enveloped us from west, north and south with infantry units of the 7th Army Corps, while the SS Reich Division is blocking us in the east.

"2. After dark on July 27 all units and staffs shall abandon the city of Mogilev and begin a break-out:

"a) units on the left bank of the Dnieper shall, under the general command of Shcheglov, Commander of the 747th Infantry Regiment, strike out in the northerly direction, the points of the break-through being picked by the regimental commander. After breaking out of the ring the units shall turn towards the forest east of Mogilev and advance until contact is made with other Soviet units;

"b) units on the right bank of the Dnieper shall, under the general command of Kutepov, the Commander of the 388th Infantry Regiment, break out in the south-westerly direction along the Bobruisk highway towards the brick factory and onward to the forest around Dashkovka village in the rear of the enemy. Later, moving southward along the Dnieper the troops shall cross to the left bank and advance in an easterly direction until contact is made with other Soviet units;

"c) the control group, divisional IIQ and headquarters units (signals battalion, engineers battalion, etc.) shall move behind the 388th Infantry Regiment in the second echelon."

General Romanov ordered all units, staffs and sub-units to destroy or put out of action property and arms which they could not take with them, and to burn all money in the possession of the finance department, and all documents (codes, cyphers, etc.). The wounded who were unable to move on their own were to be abandoned at the divisional hospital in Mogilev in the care of a few medical officers. Army doctor Vladimir Kuznetsov, chief of the divisional hospital, was to stay behind as senior surgeon.

Thus ended the brief war council in Mogilev. The

conferrees lost no time in returning to their units to begin preparing them for the contemplated move.

Far in the enemy rear, with the Soviet front as much as 100 km away, the 172nd Division functioned on as a part of the Red Army. The Mogilev defenders clung on behind light field fortifications against a furious onslaught by Guderian's armoured troops, performing what one may safely describe as the impossible. Their feat is doubly significant because the 172nd had nothing but incendiary bottles and bundles of hand-grenades to fight off Guderian's panzers.

Following the divisional commander's orders, the unit commanders issued instructions to prepare for a night counter-attack. In the meantime, fighting all along the front continued unabated. The nazi artillery and mortar bombardment kept gaining in intensity.

The 388th Regiment assigned an assault force to move in the vanguard and breach the nazi ring. It was to strike out toward Rogachov, then power-cross the Dnieper and seek contact with Soviet troops in the Gomel area. Colonel Kutepov and Captain Plotnikov assumed command of the assault force.

The rearguard unit, which was to cover the withdrawal on the west bank of the Dnieper, was a combined regiment, consisting of the headquarters troops, militia units and local volunteers. It was headed by acting divisional chief of staff Major Vasily Katyushin.

At midnight the vanguard engaged the enemy in the pre-arranged sector. Divisional HQ with the commander and commissar, set out simultaneously. The city was then under heavy enemy fire. Taking advantage of the darkness, strict orders having been issued to light no fires, the headquarters personnel gathered in the yard of School No. 11. Last-minute preparations were being completed under heavy shelling. The divisional commander set out at the head of the column in an armoured car, followed by his staff. On reaching the street that led out of the city, the column encountered a string of enemy vehicles, which had broken into the city after dark. The staff column took care not to betray itself, and lined up in the tail of the nazi troop. The night was dark, it was raining heavily, and the enemy did not notice anything wrong. In this manner our with-

drawing troops reached Bobruisk highway near the silk factory. By that time, however, the nazis guessed our intentions and lit up the terrain with rockets and spotlights. What was worse, they blanketed the highway with their artillery. Our men took cover in roadside ditches and fired back sparingly, economising on ammunition. General Romanov took charge, and stayed in the battle despite being seriously wounded in the left shoulder.

The main force of the headquarters column did not reach the forest until much later, something like 10 a.m. In the meantime, the nazis brought up fresh strength from Bobruisk to meet the retreating Soviet troops.

The rearguard, meanwhile, was engaged in a ferocious scuffle in the city streets, trying to divert the enemy's attention from the main force. Major Katyushin's men battled heroically to the last bullet. Most of them fell in one of the city squares, where a particularly bloody clash occurred. The fate of most of Katyushin's men is unknown to this day. A few of them later reached the Tishovo forest near Dashkovka. A combined unit was formed in the forest of what was left of the division's troops on the western bank of the Dnieper. All it had was light firearms and added up to about battalion strength. The unit set out along the prearranged route to Rogachov.

Moving was anything but easy. Every time a highway had to be crossed there was fighting, for a ceaseless stream of nazi troops travelled along all roads. Rogachov had a fairly numerous enemy garrison. It proved impossible to force the Dnieper there. So the unit drew back to Novy Bykhov, where it got across the river. Then it moved farther east through the remote villages of Obidovichi, Bolshaya Zimnitsa, Chernyakovka and Khlevno, finally reaching the Sozh River. Villagers who were eager to help served as guides.

On August 18 the unit reached Smolensk Region and halted near a small village on the Besed River.

German troops were advancing along the Khotimsk-Roslavl and Krichev-Roslavl motor roads, which were near-by. Making camp in a wood, the unit reconnoitred and prepared to cross the line of the front. The men distinctly heard machine guns firing. The gunfire was deafening. Soviet planes droned overhead. Obviously, the front line

was near. But patrols sent out to investigate the area at night discovered that the enemy was alertly guarding the front.

New columns of nazi troops were being moved up. Divisional Commissar Chernichenko and Commissar Anpilov of the 493rd Artillery Regiment decided to consult the men, because they thought it all but hopeless to try crossing the front en masse. The soldiers were fatigued by the marches and skirmishes. Most of them were wounded or sick. An improvised war council decided that survivors should carry on in small groups of two and three.

It is hard to say at this point how right this decision was. Unfortunately, little or no evidence has come to hand about the fate of most of the men.

As for the 747th Regiment, by July 27, when the regiment was to have begun its operation, its sub-units had partially restored their positions at Lupolovo Station. The nazi attacks ceased. A lull ensued. At night on July 27 the remnants of the regiment under Regimental Commander Lt.-Col. Shcheglov and Regimental Commissar Kuznetsov, set out towards Sukhari village, where the 425th Regiment of the 110th Division and the remnants of the 20th Mechanised Corps were being hard pressed by the enemy. On July 30, the 747th made contact with them and proceeded together, fighting on the march, in an effort to reach the Yartsevo-Yelna-Roslavl line. Mostly, they used partisan methods. In August 1941 the units finally reached the main Soviet forces.

The subsequent fate of the commanders, political officers and soldiers of the 172nd Division differed. To begin with, a word about General Mikhail Romanov, the Divisional Commander. The good name of that courageous soldier and stalwart son of the socialist land was consigned to oblivion at the time of the Stalin cult. He proved an excellent leader, a man of extraordinary will-power, great courage and bravery. The commanders and political officers who knew him speak of him in glowing terms. His wife, Maria Romanova, told me about his life before the war. He was born in Nizhni-Novgorod on November 21, 1891. His father, an artisan, died when Mikhail was 15 years old. By that time the boy had graduated the city school with honours. After his father's death, the lad had to earn a liveli-

hood for his mother Anna Nikolayevna and his younger sister, Julia. Mikhail became an artisan like his father. He worked from early morning until late at night. But on Sundays he went to the city library. He liked to go to the theatre, and was particularly fond of the opera. He had a pleasant and deep voice himself, and passionately loved music. Chaliapin, Sobinov and the other giants of the Russian opera, who performed frequently at the time in Nizhni-Novgorod, made an undying impression on the boy.

In 1915 Mikhail Romanov was called up to the army and sent to the Chistopol Ensigns School, which he graduated six months later. Then he served in the 72nd Regiment at Rzhev. After the February Revolution the soldiers elected him to the regimental committee. His regiment was then stationed on the Russo-German front. After the October Revolution, Romanov returned to Rzhev, where he soon volunteered to the Red Army, in which he served for the rest of his life.

A hard-working and persistent disciplinarian, he had a knack of winning the affection of his subordinates, and quickly gained considerable authority. Soon, the 3rd Regiment, in which Mikhail Romanov was chief of the regimental school, was sent to the eastern front. Romanov took part in the fighting against Kolchak in the Civil War. Subsequently, he was assigned to the 11th Infantry Regiment, which was engaged against the *basmachi* in Turkestan. In his capacity of deputy regimental commander he took part in a number of dangerous operations, and was wounded in the head. In hospital he was visited by Mikhail Frunze. After recovering from his wound, Romanov was appointed Commander of the 11th Regiment for his extraordinary ability and courage shown in fighting the *basmachi*.

Romanov's regiment was stationed in the city of Verny (Alma-Ata) and preoccupied with peacetime training. Romanov was an avid sportsman and particularly fond of horse-riding, taking part in many equestrian competitions. He stayed in Central Asia until 1923. Then he was sent for training, after which he was put in command of the 50th Infantry Regiment, 17th Division, stationed in Nizhni-Novgorod, and later of the 18th Regiment in Livny. He put much effort into training his unit. The regiment was always first in competitions against other units of the division. The

men of the regiment, which Mikhail Romanov legitimately considered as of his own making, acquitted itself excellently during the Great Patriotic War.

Mikhail Romanov was a good husband and a mentor and friend to his two sons and a daughter. His elder son died a hero's death in the war.

In 1939 Romanov was appointed Commander of the 185th Division. In 1940 he was promoted to Major-General, and made Commander of the 172nd Infantry Division after a 6 months' course at the General Staff Academy. His splendid record on the Dnieper line has earned him the eternal gratitude of the Soviet people.

Unfortunately, no more than patchy information is available of the General's fate.

After Romanov was wounded, two officers were appointed to accompany him to a prearranged hiding place. According to Yelena Ablozhnaya, now living in Mogilev, the seriously wounded General reached Barsuki village and was put up at her parents', the Asmolovskys, who were collective farmers.

Here is what Ablozhnaya wrote to me:

"We lived in the village of Barsuki, of Mogilev District. On July 28, 1914, my father, Mikhail Asmolovsky, told me there was a wounded Major-General in our bathhouse at the far end of the vegetable patch near the bushes alongside the Lokhva River. I took my first-aid kit and went there. I saw a man in the uniform of a top-ranking officer (two large stars on the collar), who was bleeding badly. I dressed his wounds. His undershirt was torn to shreds, for he had used parts of it for bandages. I gave him a little to eat, and brought him into the house after nightfall. The wound was serious. The bullet had shattered his left shoulder blade and was lodged in the chest. It took a long time to mend him. Dr. Valentina Frolenko looked after him. We took all sorts of precautions to prevent his being discovered.

"During his stay at our house Mikhail Romanov organised a resistance group of stray servicemen and a few of the villagers. I knew two of the servicemen—Jr. Lt. Nabatov and Sgt.-Mj. Grigory Bobak. My brother Fyodor Asmolovsky, my husband Semyon Ablozhny, Yevgeny Ruprecht, my father and I belonged to the group as well.

We collected arms and ammunition, and helped stray soldiers change into civilian clothes. Our supply of ammunition, which we hid in the forest, grew to fairly big proportions. My main duty was to look after Romanov. He dreamed of big operations and of crossing the front line. On September 15 my father took Nabatov and Bobak across the Dnieper. After Mogilev was liberated, Sergeant Bobak visited the city, found us, and took his papers, which we had hidden for him.

"On September 18 or 19 Mikhail Romanov sent my husband and me to reconnoitre the Drut River. Partisans had already begun operating in the dense forests along its banks. On coming home, we were stunned to learn that Germans had raided the village at dawn on September 22, 1941. They shot 13 people. Among them were five members of my family—my father, mother, brother, sister-in-law and grandmother. The villagers told me that the nazis took Mikhail Romanov with them. I have heard nothing about him since then. We have his papers—the Party card, a medal issued on the 20th anniversary of the Red Army and its certificate, a certificate of his rank of Major-General, and a pass of the Ministry of Defence. That is all I can remember. In 1942 we turned all the papers over to the 113th partisan detachment to be forwarded to Moscow."

Maria Romanova, the General's wife, has letters from two veterans of the 172nd. One of them writes:

"I had been wounded, and when the Germans took the city I was in the Mogilev hospital. One day a rumour spread that General Romanov, who was wounded, escaped from the nazis. It was good news, and the whole hospital was jubilant. Everybody was saying General Romanov had shown us the way to behave when you are in the clutches of nazis."

The other soldier, who had been in the Mogilev POW cage near the airfield, writes:

"General Romanov's escape created a commotion among the nazis. Evidently, they took extraordinary measures to recapture him. After his unsuccessful escape, Romanov was kept in solitary confinement. Wounded in the shoulder, his arm shattered, beaten and tormented, he lay in his cell on a pile of fetid straw. Posing as a male nurse, I brought him water to drink. On the off chance that I would

survive, Romanov gave me a cypher, whereby I would find his family in Gorky if I forgot the address."

It was this cypher that helped the man find General Romanov's family in Gorky after the war.

The same soldier told Maria Romanova when he visited her that her husband was photographed at the POW camp after his abortive escape. He was unable to stand and two Gestapomen had held him up.

Chernichenko ex-Commissar of the 172nd, adds the following:

"When I was a nazi prisoner at the Ivanovsky Fortress in December 1941, I happened to see a German magazine with a picture of Mikhail Romanov. He was in the middle, and nazis stood on both sides of him. Romanov was dressed in civilian clothes. His right shoulder was raised. He had his right hand in the side pocket of his jacket. The caption read, 'Major-General Romanov, Commander of the 172nd Infantry Division, was arrested in the city of Borisov, as a leader of the partisan movement in Byelorussia, and hung'."

All available testimony indicates that General Romanov had been true to his country, the Communist cause, to his last breath, that he had been subjected to brutal torture and was finally executed.

One Soviet military institution continued to function in the city after divisional headquarters and Soviet troops withdrew from Mogilev. It was the divisional hospital. The divisional command had done its utmost to prevent nazi ill-treatment of the wounded. Two army surgeons were assigned to stay with Vladimir Kuznetsov, the hospital chief. One was Alexei Parshin, Commander of the 224th Medical Battalion, and the other was Fyodor Pashanin, junior surgeon of the same battalion. Nearly all the available food supplies, equipment, medical supplies and dressings were left at the hospital when the division made its break. A system of communications was worked out for liaison with Party workers who had stayed behind in the city for underground work.

Vladimir Kuznetsov was extracting a shell splinter from the crushed arm of a gunner, a junior sergeant, and could barely remember how many more operations he had performed that day, when Samuil Prikhodko, Chief of the Division's Political Department, entered the operation

V. P. Kuznetsov



theatre. He asked the surgeon to come to his office after the operation. There, eye-to-eye with him, he said:

"You attended the conference at General Romanov's and know that you have been ordered to stay with the wounded in Mogilev after the division withdraws. Your mission is anything but easy. The lives of 4,000 men depend on your courage, your wits, your resourcefulness. We trust you and know you will do everything you can to mitigate the lot of your patients."

Kuznetsov looked squarely at the Commissar and replied quietly:

"I'll do my best, and more."

After Prikhodko left, the senior surgeon summoned Parshin and Pashanin. He shut the door and said to them:

"Tonight, about an hour from now, the division will leave the city. By decision of the command, the three of us will stay in Mogilev with the wounded."

The two doctors took the news calmly. Their chief continued:

"Much has to be done, and all we have is one night to do it in. The nazis are killers. The first they will want to kill are the Party members, the officers and the political workers. We have to see to it that our wounded are saved. Also, we must continue treating all patients in more or

less the best way. It is up to us, too, to look after ourselves, and we shall have to keep our wits about us and show the utmost caution.

"Our supplies of food and medicine will have to be hidden from the enemy, but now, as soon as you go back to your work, destroy all papers that may indicate Party members, officers and political workers. Make out new papers for them. Put down that they are privates or sergeants, that they are not members of the Party, or say that they are civilians wounded in the bombardments. See to it that the people whose papers you alter know about it."

While the division fought desperately to break out of the nazi encirclement, Kuznetsov and his colleagues were "transforming" Communists into non-Communists and officers and political workers into privates. This took all night, and saved hundreds of stalwart men from a brutal death. The bulk of the work was done by Kuznetsov himself.

On the following day the nazis came to the hospital. It was a dramatic moment. The doctors did their best to act naturally, but their nerves were on edge.

"Who is chief here?" a German surgeon in the rank of Oberleutnant asked. The orderly pointed to Kuznetsov. The Oberleutnant asked how many wounded there were in the hospital.

"About 3,800," Kuznetsov said.

The nazi asked to be shown to the office, and the interpreters who accompanied him began looking through the papers. Their bewilderment mounted as they leafed through the medical cards.

"What about the commanders, the political officers, the Communists?" the Oberleutnant asked Kuznetsov impatiently.

Kuznetsov replied as calmly as he could:

"I heard someone say at our headquarters the German High Command had issued orders to repress all Communists, political officers, officers and servicemen of Jewish descent. Apparently, all the wounded of this description were shipped to the rear."

"What about the time your troops were surrounded? Where did you take your wounded Communists then?" the nazi doctor asked, looking closely at Kuznetsov.

Kuznetsov replied swiftly:

"The time we were surrounded completely was relatively short. The Communists and officers wounded in this period were taken along by the troops and have evidently been captured or killed by you, because, according to your reports, none of our people have broken out of your ring."

This was how the first questioning ended. Kuznetsov had the impression that his replies had not created suspicion.

The three Soviet surgeons remained at the hospital. The Germans kept them in their previous jobs, but appointed their own "commissars" and set a guard.

Apart from doing their basic duty as surgeons, Kuznetsov and his closest associates did underground work. To begin with, they saw to it that recuperated soldiers did not land in POW camps, and smuggled them out to the partisans.

The resourceful surgeons developed a variety of methods. Often, they carted recuperated soldiers off to the morgue, and wrote in their cards that they had died. From the morgue the men were helped to escape to the partisans.

Many of the men were dehospitalised as civilians (according to the changed papers). Such patients joined the partisans or the Mogilev underground organisation. The surgeons were betrayed by a German agent, a man named Stepanov, whom the nazis had appointed chief of the health department of the Mogilev city administration, and a man named Kasnaki, whom Stepanov kept in the hospital as his informer. The two traitors got wind of what Kuznetsov, Parshin and Pashanin were doing. Stepanov informed on them to the Gestapo, and the three were arrested.

Brutal torture in a nazi jail failed to break the three Communists. They were loyal to their country to the last breath, and were publicly executed in the main city square on November 17, 1941. Before ascending the scaffold, Kuznetsov shouted loudly to the crowd of people herded into the square by the nazis:

"Glory to our country! Disgrace on bloody fascism!"

The doctors met their death bravely, heads high.

A Captain Yurov, of whose exploits wonders are now

told, was hung together with them. One of the stories about Yurov says he came to the nazi-appointed burgomaster and blandly introduced himself as the chief of a partisan detachment. He asked for help and threatened to shoot the burgomaster if he did not do what he was told. The burgomaster was frightened out of his wits and made no attempt to apprehend Yurov. Yurov paid a similar call on the police chief and made the latter give him all papers concerning Yurov (that is, himself).

Yurov was later recognised by a nazi agent at the Rodina Cinema, and arrested. He had been caught on a few previous occasions, but had managed to escape. This time the Gestapo hanged him together with the three doctors.

November 17, 1941, was a black day in Mogilev. The public execution of the Soviet patriots was intended to intimidate the population and blunt its resistance. But it achieved the very opposite. In the square, into which they were herded forcibly, many Mogilev citizens swore to themselves they would avenge the death of their countrymen. When the sentence was read, the square rumbled menacingly. The bristling bayonets of the SS and police guards round the scaffold glinted as the nazis closed their ranks. Suddenly the crowd heard Kuznetsov's loudly shouted appeal to organise resistance. The square hummed again, but this time it was a hum of approval.

After the execution fresh hundreds of Mogilev citizens joined partisan detachments, and underground work in the city expanded.

The despicable Stepanov, who had given the doctors away, has so far escaped justice and now resides in the United States.

The defence of Mogilev, treated by historians until lately as no more than one of the numerous heroic episodes of Soviet resistance, really had a far greater impact. To begin with, it showed how events could have developed in the early period of the war if we had had a chance to build field defences along the Dnieper and other important lines, to deploy troops there, to mass our guns, work out a firing system and prepare counter-measures to parry Wehrmacht panzer thrusts. Guderian and his northern neighbour Hoth

would never have succeeded then with their reckless and dubious scheme of reaching the far approaches to Moscow before the arrival of the main nazi force. The striking power of their panzer groups would have been blunted in the attempts to overwhelm our defences.

As it was, our defences had too many weaknesses. This is why the enemy was able to cross the Dnieper in the 13th Army sector. The work of fortifying the line had not been completed, and some of the troops had not arrived before the enemy came to his start line. The nazi panzer lunges tore our front to shreds quite easily, emerging on our flanks and rear.

It is a good thing the planners of the Mogilev defence had anticipated a nazi envelopment and built the defences accordingly. The rear lines of the 172nd Division were just as strong as the front lines.

We may speculate today whether or not there was any sense in defending the city after the troops were encircled and whether it may not have been wiser to withdraw. I think the move was justified. Thanks to good organisation a relatively small Soviet force checked a greatly superior enemy. The enemy suffered heavy losses. The Mogilev strongpoint held up the nazi panzers, and later the nazi infantry, and hindered the latter's co-operation with the forward nazi armoured groups.

The stand at Mogilev and other points detained the nazis and enabled numerous Soviet troops to filter out of the enemy pockets in small groups and singly, and rejoin the main Soviet force. Besides, it touched off the partisan movement in Byelorussia and gave heart to underground resistance fighters in Byelorussian towns and villages.

By clinging to Mogilev, the Soviet forces greatly impaired the nazi supply system. Mogilev was a big railway and road junction and the nazis wanted to use it as a point of transit for manpower and war freights. It was this that had prompted the nazi command to send as many as three divisions in late July to squash the lone, badly battered Soviet division, cut off from the main force, although it was clear it could not resist for very long.

The heroic 23-day defence of Mogilev was a model of bravery and devotion, and of close-knit co-operation between Soviet troops and the civilian population. The daring

feat of the Mogilev defenders was to be repeated many times over at other points in the war. To be sure, it was the prototype of the heroic Stalingrad defence, where the exploits of Mogilev's defenders were emulated on a far larger scale and with a much happier ending, for by then the situation on the Soviet-German front and throughout the country had changed radically for the better.

Today, twenty-three years since the last salvo resounded on the Dnieper bank, my heart swells with pride when I page through the memoirs of veterans of the Mogilev defence.

CHAPTER FIVE

COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

The 13th Army's left neighbour was the 21st Army commanded from late June to early July by Lt.-Gen. Vasily Gerasimenko and then successively by Marshal of the Soviet Union Semyon Budenny, Lt. Gen. Mikhail Yefremov, Col. Gen. Fyodor Kuznetsov and Mj. Gen. Vasily Gordov.

Originally, some of the elements that later became part of the 13th Army, such as the 45th and 61st infantry corps, had been in the 21st Army. On July 7, when the fighting shifted to the Dnieper line, the troops from Shklov to Loyev were reshuffled. The 21st Army now consisted of the 63rd Infantry Corps under Lt.-Gen. Leonid Petrovsky (whose 61st, 117th and 167th divisions held the Radilovichi-Rogachov-Tsuper sector), the 66th Infantry Corps under Mj. Gen. Fyodor Rubtsov (whose 232nd and 154th divisions held the Zhlobin-Streshin sector), the 67th Infantry Corps under Brigade Commander Filipp Zhmachenko (whose 151st and 132nd divisions held the Rezhitsa-Gomel-Dobrush Loyev sector), and the 25th Mechanised Corps under Mj.-Gen. Semyon Krivoshein (whose 219th motorised infantry, 50th and 55th tank divisions were in the second echelon in and around Novozibkov).

To sum up, by July 10 the 21st Army had eight infantry divisions—including the 75th, which was transferred to the 66th Infantry Corps from the 4th Army—along a fairly long front from Novy Bykhov to Loyev. The 75th rolling back slowly along the Pripyat River, had by then reached the Lenin-David-Gorodok line. A panzer division, a cavalry division of the 24th Panzer Corps, which belonged to Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group, and an infantry division of the 2nd Field Army opposed the sector held by the 21st Army

along the Dnieper. The nazi command was aware that 21st Army troops were dispositioned in the Gomel area, but attached no significance to it for the time being, and planned no major actions against it.

Between July 1 and 12, 1941, the 21st Army regrouped and built a line of fortifications, preparing busily for the battles to come.

On July 8, the Army repulsed several enemy attempts to force the Dnieper near Veshchino and stemmed nazi jabs all along the front with gun and mortar fire. The enemy, for his part, kept shelling the lines of the 21st Army incessantly. However, in the next three days the nazis became noticeably quieter and the Soviet troops had a chance to speed the construction of defence lines, while patrols reconnoitred.

By the evening of July 11 the enemy captured bridgeheads south of Orsha and north of Bykhov. The following morning he made the most of the bridgeheads for a fresh easterly attack.

The Soviet High Command countered on July 12 with an order to the Command of the Western Front to hold the Dnieper line from Orsha to Mogilev, and to counter-attack from Smolensk, Rudnya, Orsha, Polotsk and Nevel in order to mend the breach made by the enemy near Vitebsk and to undertake a counter-offensive from the Gomel area against Bobruisk. The objective was to reach the rear of the enemy group striking at Mogilev.

The counter blows by the northern wing of the Western Front will be dealt with later. Let us just note that they were not as successful as we had expected, though they did draw off a large enemy force.

In a nutshell, the 21st Army was to counter-attack in the Bobruisk direction, dislodge the enemy there, and restore the front along the Berezina River. According to the operational plan, the offensive was to begin on the morning of July 13. Six divisions made up the first echelon, and the 151st Infantry Division stood by in the second. The 219th Motorised Infantry and 50th Tank divisions were to follow up. However, neither managed to assemble its forces by the appointed hour.

Units of the 67th Corps were to move westward from the Novy Bykhov-Gadilovich line. The 63rd Corps, assigned

to strike directly at Bobruisk, was to advance along the Zhlobin-Bobruisk highway from Gadilovichi-Streshin. The 66th, which occupied initial positions in the Streshin Bely Bereg sector, was to flank Bobruisk from the south.

The Army had no engineers and no river-forcing equipment. So the Dnieper had to be crossed with makeshift facilities, which took somewhat longer than expected. All the same, the offensive began at the set time. It developed successfully at first. By 8 p.m. on July 13 the main forces had crossed over to the other bank and advanced some 8-10 kilometres. Nazi forward units, which had come to the area earlier, began to withdraw under cover of smoke-screens, destroying the bridges as they moved out. Our battle lines were continuously hammered by shellfire and mortars. In the next two days our troops in face of ferocious resistance crawled forward another 4-6 kilometres. Late on July 16 they reached Verichev, Zabolotye and Rudnya. Vanguards of the Nazi 1st Cavalry Division, 21st Panzer Corps, of Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group, were active in the area. They had reached the environs of Novy Bykhov. The Soviet 63rd Corps crushed their security patrols, forced the Dnieper and relieved the cities of Zhlobin and Rogachov.

A fairly complete picture of the 21st Army operation, particularly that of the 63rd Infantry Corps, is contained in the memoirs of Mj.-Gen. Vasily Rakovsky, former Commander of the Corps' 167th Division.

"By mid-day on July 12," he writes, "I was summoned to the Corps Commander with all available information of the morale and fighting power of my troops. The 21st Army Commander was present at Corps CP. I introduced myself and was given the following oral order: at 15.00 hours on July 13 my 167th Infantry Division was to force the Dnieper and capture Rogachov with the subsequent objective of advancing on Bobruisk.

"This came as a surprise. The 167th was stretched thinly on a long front and was not ready for an attack. I asked for time to prepare. The Commander explained, however, that he could not give me any time.

"Instantly, I phoned Colonel Chechin, my Chief of Staff, from the Corps Commander's office to assemble all unit commanders, their seconds, and the staff chiefs, and to move the division's river-crossing facilities to the bank. He

replied that our crossing gear had been demolished that day by enemy planes. This made the situation doubly complicated.

"Before my departure, Corps Commander General Petrovsky said he would let me have the Corps artillery regiment, whose commander was already on his way to my CP. He added that at 15.00 hours he would himself come to the crossing near Rogachov.

"On the way back Commissar Sergeyev and I discussed the plan of action, deeply conscious that some of the difficulties facing us were all but too much for us.

"All officers had already come to the divisional CP when we arrived. I told them of our mission briefly and asked the chief of engineers and the artillery chief what they had to say. We planned to force the Dnieper at two regimental sectors. The 520th Infantry Regiment under Lt.-Col. Ivan Nekrasov was to cross near a blown up wooden bridge close to Rogachov, while the 615th Infantry Regiment under Col. Yefim Golobokov would operate behind a smoke-screen along the biggest frontage possible to divert the enemy. Makeshift rafts and the boats in the possession of regimental commanders were all that we had for the crossing. The 520th was to capture Rogachov, while the 615th would seize a bridgehead 1.5 to 2 kilometres deep. There were numerous rafts and timber flotations along the western bank of the Dnieper, and we decided sending a unit across under gun cover to capture them and build a pontoon bridge.

"After I had issued the order, our political officers and Communists explained the task to the rest of the men, and impressed its importance on them.

"The complicated situation and the general hardships had knit the personnel of the division closely. All men were eager to tackle the difficult assignment. This sense of devotion and deep determination made all the difference between success and failure. Stretched thinly along a front of 30 kilometres, the division regrouped and primed for the offensive, which involved crossing a wide water barrier with makeshift means.

"The day was sunny and hot. Intensive preparations were underway on the bank, behind cover of trees and bushes. One unit after another arrived on the scene. The

men marched up rapidly. They knew an offensive was being planned, and were greatly encouraged. General Petrovsky's arrival just before our shelling began, proved of great help. I remember coming to the Rogachov bridge and seeing the Corps Commander come. He and I checked whether the first echelon was ready for the crossing. The companies of the 2nd Battalion, 520th Regiment, were ready to row across shock squads to capture a bridgehead under artillery cover. Petrovsky gave Capt. Pokatilo and Political Instructor Kozlov, who were in command, some valuable advice.

"Col. Rudsit, the artillery chief of the division, reported that his guns and mortars were all set. The preparation began at 15.00 sharp. We had never so far opened such withering fire. Three artillery regiments, an artillery battalion and the mortars, fairly blanketed the enemy. We could see the stunned nazis rush about on the other bank.

"As soon as the first artillery salvo was fired boats with the shock force pulled away from the bank. The raft-launching and bridge-building squads we had formed to help the engineers, pitched in. Soldiers of the engineers battalion pulled up rafts, tied them to the pillars of the demolished bridge, and covered them with planking from the surviving part of the bridge.

"The enemy was shocked into silence by our bombardment. But soon he regained his senses and opened up with guns and mortars. Nazi planes appeared and dropped bombs. Our plight was unenviable, but the men carried on. The battalion of engineers, recently formed and young in age, did its job splendidly. The plank bridge all the way across the river was ready very quickly. To this day, I remember that glorious hour with pride: the engineers working on stoutly, in total disregard of exploding shells, mines and bombs. Unfortunately, their names have escaped my memory.

"When the bridge was ready, the 520th Regiment crossed to the other bank, followed by the 465th. The decision to send both regiments across was prompted by General Petrovsky. Having drawn off enemy attention, the 615th Regiment was unable to cross over in strength in its sector, where the enemy was alerted, although a few platoons reached the other bank and clung to a narrow bridgehead.

Were we to try and send the rest of the regiment across, the cost in lives would have been too great. Besides, it would take too long.

"As soon as the 520th Regiment came across, the offensive jumped off. Savage fighting broke out in Rogachov. The enemy made the most of previously fortified buildings and rendered stubborn resistance. Oblivious of danger, our men charged and crushed the nazi strong points. I recall the after action report of Lt.-Col. Ivan Nekrasov, Commander of the 520th, about the daring of his men and officers.

"A gap appeared between the regiments during the battle for the city. The nazis attempted a flank attack and our right flank unit recoiled. At that crucial moment Sergeant Lukyanenko ran forward, shouting, 'Stand your ground! Kill the invaders!' He rushed to a machine gun some distance away, whose gunner had been killed, and fired on the enemy. The rest of the unit gained heart. Its well-aimed fire made the nazis retreat. However, Captain Pokatilo, Commander of the 2nd Battalion, was killed. He was the first to cross the Dnieper and the first to enter Rogachov. Despite losing its commander, the battalion fought on valiantly. The fighting in the city lasted until 11 p.m., July 14.

"Under cover of darkness the nazis withdrew across the Drut River.

"As soon as the infantry of the 520th and 465th regiments were across the Dnieper, we started building a crossing for the artillery. It was ready by dawn July 15, and the 576th Artillery Regiment under Lt. Col. Stepan Popov was the first to use it. The howitzer regiment under Major Likhachov remained in its initial positions. Rear units worked all night long, supplying the troops with ammunition and food.

"I reported by phone to the Corps Commander and received instructions to maintain firm control. He ordered me to continue the offensive after the 576th Artillery Regiment will have crossed to the western bank. On the next day, the division, whose supplies had been replenished overnight, resumed the advance. We moved 10-12 kilometres and ran into stiff resistance. The nazis had rushed in reserves, and murderous clashes ensued.

"Although we suffered considerable losses and Nekrasov, Commander of the 520th, was wounded, the division repulsed the fresh enemy forces and pressed them back substantially, occupying a few more towns and villages."

Soon enemy resistance mounted steeply. The nazis moved in the 53rd Army Corps of the 2nd Field Army in strength to check our 63rd Corps.

The advance of the 66th Corps or, to be more precise, of its 232nd Division, which constituted the first echelon, developed encouragingly. The division met no serious enemy resistance, and its forward units came to within 25-40 kilometres south and south-west of Bobruisk towards the close of July 14. This alerted the nazi command. Apprehensive for the flanks of the nazi troops advancing on Mogilev, it sent its 43rd Army Corps in full strength out of its reserve against the 66th Corps, then rushed in another two infantry divisions. As we learn from Guderian's book, the nazi command thought some 20 Soviet divisions were advancing on Bobruisk from the Gomel area.

On July 17 the nazis mounted several fierce counter-attacks. They were particularly active in the Propoisk (Slavgorod) sector, at Rogachov and at Zhitkovichi. Enemy infantry and panzers enveloped the flanks of the advanced Soviet units. The 67th Corps ceased its attempts to advance and covered the Army's right flank. Its 151st Infantry Division destroyed something like a regiment of enemy infantry, while the 132nd retreated to Novy Bykhov under superior pressure and assumed the defensive in that area.

On the following day, the advanced divisions of the 21st Army attempted to develop their early success in the direction of Bobruisk. But there was an accession of enemy power there, and nazi counter-attacks, coupled with artillery and air pounding, grew more effective. It was all too clear to us that the main nazi forces in the sector had been ordered to check our 63rd Corps. It repulsed all counter-attacks, and stood its ground. The 232nd Division of the 66th Corps fought stubbornly along the Borovaya-Korolyov-Svoboda line. The other divisions held the eastern bank of the Dnieper. Fresh forces, though fairly slim, were being brought up from the rear.

All through July 20 the 21st Army fought stiff engagements against the arriving forces of two enemy army corps.

The Soviet units were compelled to abandon further attempts at advancing on Bobruisk and concentrated on holding their line. They succeeded by and large until July 22.

In the next few days the greatly depleted 63rd Corps and the divisions that co operated with it, withdrew to the Dnieper from Zhlobin to Rogachov to avoid total encirclement.

To be sure, on July 24 a Soviet cavalry group of three divisions broke through south west and west of Bobruisk on the left flank of the 232nd Division, imperilling the communication lines of the German 2nd Army. To restore the breach, the nazis rushed in three infantry divisions of the High Command Reserve. These stayed in the area for three weeks to guard the rear and the communication lines menaced by the Soviet mounted troops.

On July 25 the 21st Army, like the 13th Army adjoining it on the north, was transferred from the Western Front to the command of the newly formed Central Front.

As part of our Western Front, the 21st Army had acquitted itself as a fine command, showing that the Red Army was capable of active offensive operations despite the heavy odds. To sum up, I want to say that the 21st Army was ordered to take Bobruisk, a strategic road junction, on July 13, before it had completed deployment. Yet the operation involved smashing enemy troops, who had crossed the Berezina, getting across the Dnieper and crushing the nazis in the area in a head-on thrust.

The Soviet troops, who had done extremely well in power crossing the Dnieper and taking up attack positions on the western bank, did not get the necessary reinforcements to develop their success, while the enemy was able to rush in reserves and deploy large infantry forces supported by panzers and planes in their path. Not only did these check the Soviet troops, but counter attacked, forcing them to retreat in face of possible encirclement and defeat.

All the same, the 21st Army fought well and inflicted considerable losses on the enemy, impairing co-operation between its advanced panzer troops and the army divisions advancing in their wake

The 63rd Corps, led by Lt-Gen. Leonid Petrovsky, a gifted soldier and son of Grigory Ivanovich Petrovsky, the

L. G. Petrovsky



distinguished leader of the Communist Party and of the Soviet state, played a prominent and decisive role in these battles.

The Corps acquitted itself splendidly in defence as well, displaying extraordinary tenacity. Until the end of July and the first half of August 1941 its divisions held their positions stoutly, keeping at bay five enemy infantry divisions.

At dawn on August 14 the enemy mounted a strong offensive in superior strength all along the front and pushed our forces up against the Dnieper.

The Commander of the 21st ordered the Corps to cross to the eastern bank of the Dnieper. The withdrawal was extremely difficult. One of the regiments of the 61st Infantry Division and the Corps Headquarters troop were surrounded near the village of Syatoye. General Petrovsky assumed personal command of the vanguard units to breach the Nazi ring. His troops broke out near Santinovka Station. By that time, however, the enemy closed in again, sealing the pocket round the 61st and 154th Infantry Divisions, the Corps artillery and headquarters. The main force of the Corps was gripped by pincers south-east of Zhlobin on August 16. General Petrovsky decided to crash out and

set his units specific tasks. They were to attack the enemy at night and unclasp the pincers. I wish here to quote a passage from Petrovsky's order, a vivid testimonial to the general's integrity and skill.

"All officers regardless of rank and capacity," the order read, "shall be in the front ranks, effectively armed, during the night attack, until our Corps makes contact with the main body of the Red Army. It is their task to maintain firm control over all Red Army men and subordinate officers, and lead them to Gubichi."

General Leonid Petrovsky encouraged the men by his own conduct and died a hero's death when breaking out of the enemy ring on August 17, 1941.

Here is an account of the night attack by the former Commander of the 154th Infantry Division, Y. Fokanov, now a Lieutenant-General.

"On August 16, 1941," Fokanov relates, "Lt.-Gen. Petrovsky came to my divisional command post at Khalch Station south-east of Zhlobin and instructed me and the Commander of the 61st Infantry Division to break the enemy ring. He ordered us to begin the operation at 3 a.m. on August 17. Corps HQ and Petrovsky would join the 61st Division during the break-through.

"By Petrovsky's order, the 154th Division, later renamed the 47th Guard Division, began the break-out at sharp 3 a.m. on August 17. Colonel Feigin, the Corps Chief of Staff, came to me and said Petrovsky wanted to see me.

"I left a signals battalion, a battalion of engineers and a battery of the anti-tank battalion in reserve and went to look for Petrovsky. When I found him, he told me the 61st Division was sure to break out and he would now stay with us. By that time the main force of the 154th had broken the nazi line and advanced some 6 kilometres. We covered its rear with the units we had in reserve and marched with Petrovsky from Khalch Station to the village of Rudnya-Baranovka. But the breach closed again, and we had to break the ring once more.

"We crashed the first nazi line of defence near Skepnya village 20 kilometres south-east of Zhlobin and ran head-on into a second line. In the ensuing battle the Corps Commander's aide was killed and Petrovsky was wounded in the arm.

"He ordered me to attack Skepnya village and took his own reserves somewhat north of the village to cover our flank. This was the last time I spoke to him.

"After we had overrun the second enemy line some two hours later, I met Mj.-Gen. Kazakov, the artillery chief of the 63rd Corps, who was wounded in the stomach, two kilometres north-east of Skepnya. I asked him about General Petrovsky and his staff. He said Petrovsky and his Chief of Staff, Col. Feigin, had been killed by a nazi patrol, a part of which had masqueraded in Red Army uniforms and the rest in women's dresses.

"I sent two patrols to the place pointed out by Mj.-Gen. Kazakov in search of Petrovsky and his Chief of Staff. Both groups returned with the same information, confirming Kazakov's report about the enemy ambush, but found no corpses.

"Mj. Gen. Kazakov was put on a cart and accompanied me. Soon, however, the cart was hit by a mortar shell, and the general was killed. We buried him on the spot. Later, we learned that villagers had buried Petrovsky a kilometre south of Rudenka village. After the area was liberated on July 13, 1944, his remains were exhumed in the presence of his family and buried with military honours at Staraya Rudnya Station in Zhlobin District "

Leonid Petrovsky was born in 1897 in Shcherbinsky colliery of Donetsk Region. He finished a school of ensigns during the First World War and volunteered to the Red Army, taking part in the Civil War from 1918 to 1920 on the Northern, Eastern and Southern fronts, successively as platoon commander, reconnaissance chief, brigade chief of staff, regimental commander and divisional chief of staff. After the Civil War he was in command of a division and, later, of a corps.

In my association with him, I was always struck by his deep faith in our cause and our final victory over the nazis. He had been a fervent patriot, a fine Soviet general with deep operational insight, extraordinary organisational ability, unbending will power and courage beyond compare.

This image is impregnated in the memory of all who knew him.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BATTLE OF SMOLENSK

By the second week of July the enemy made his plans somewhat more specific. The enemy army groups were set their immediate tasks at a conference in Hitler's headquarters on July 8, 1941.

Army Group North was to continue its offensive on Leningrad with the 4th Panzer Group and not wait for the infantry echelon. The objective was for the powerful right flank of the panzer group to cut the city off east and south-east. At the same time, Army Group North was to advance along the eastern shore of Chudskoye Lake on Narva and seal the routes of retreat for Soviet troops in Estonia.

Army Group Centre was to mount a strong flanking attack, and surround and annihilate the Soviet force facing its front. It was to crush what Hitler described as the "last vestiges" of organised resistance and lay bare the road to Moscow.

Army Group South was to send its left wing on Kiev and continue the general plan of surrounding Soviet troops in the Ukraine west of the Dnieper.

The Finnish army was ordered to mount an offensive both sides of the Ladoga on July 10.

The Hitler Command also planned the operations it would undertake once these objectives were attained. On reaching the area east of Smolensk, Army Group Centre was to send its infantry divisions on to Moscow. In the meantime, the 3rd Panzer Group would, depending on the situation, either support Army Group North or swarm forward to outflank Moscow. The 2nd Panzer Group would thrust south or south-east of the Dnieper from the Smolensk

area to support the offensive of Army Group South. All subsequent operations had the aim of capturing Soviet territory up to the Volga, after which raids by flying units and planes were to destroy the industrial centres still in Soviet hands.

Those were the tentative outlines of the general plan, but for a fairly long time the nazi generals were at loggerheads over them.

At the conference, Hitler announced his atrocious decision to level Moscow and Leningrad with the ground in order to avoid having to feed their population all winter. Destruction of the two cities was assigned to the Luftwaffe. Panzers were not to be involved.

Dreading the Soviet population in the occupied areas, whose will the nazi invaders were unable to crush, Hitler said German troops were not to be quartered in villages or towns, but in specially built winter barracks "because we want to be able to bomb villages at any time in the event of uprisings".*

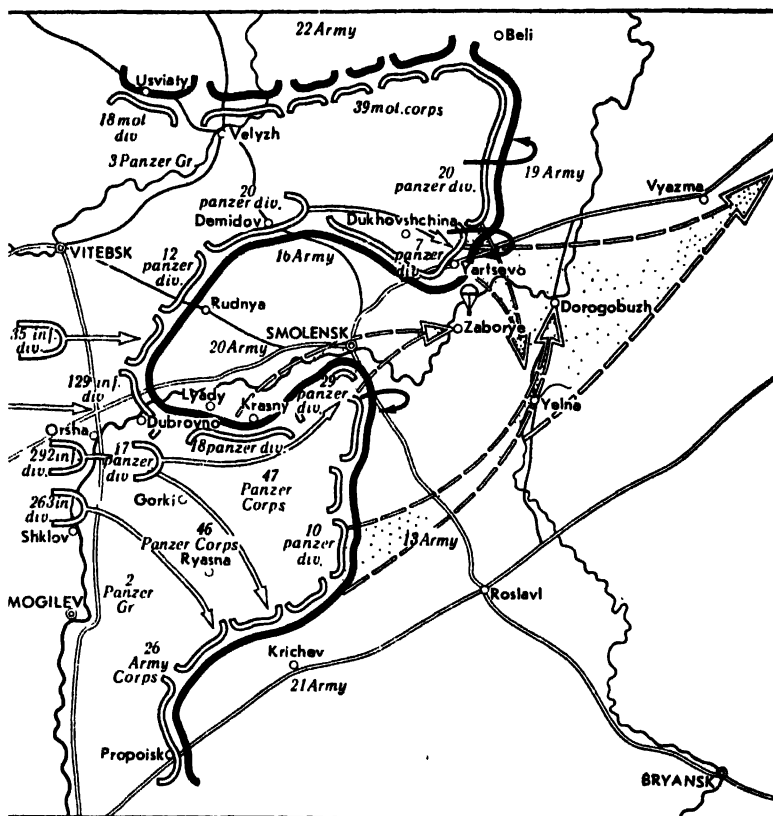
Hitler was convinced that in the very near future the war would shift from outright warfare against the Red Army to the "economic suppression" of the U.S.S.R. So much so, that he declared his wish to keep all new panzers in Germany and make sure the latest improvements in tank design are kept a secret. He issued an order on July 8 to abstain from replacing panzer losses at the front and to fuse depleted panzer divisions into new combined commands. The panzer personnel thus released was to be sent back to Germany to man new panzers.**

The situation in the battle lines was still against us. The nazis continued their advance towards Vitebsk and Smolensk.

The Western Front Commander sent me to the 19th Army sector, commanded by Lt-Gen. Ivan Konev. The 19th had been transferred from the South-Eastern Front. It was to concentrate at Yanovich, Liozno and Ponizovye, assume combat positions at the limiting point of the 22nd and 20th Armies, and prevent the capture of Vitebsk.

* Halder, *Diary*, Vol. 6, p. 212.

** Ibid.



Nazi Operational Plan at Smolensk, July 15, 1941

The Army consisted of six infantry divisions and the 23rd Mechanised Corps. By July 9 only HQ of the Army and those of the three corps, the 220th Motorised Infantry Division, two regiments of the 134th Infantry Division, one regiment of the 162nd and a few units of the 158th Division had come to their assigned area.

In the evening of July 9 a perilous situation developed at the limiting point: the enemy captured Vitebsk and threatened the rear of the main Western Front forces.

The only way to avoid disaster was to send the Front's second echelon into action, because due to the premature and unsuccessful counter-offensive of the mechanised

corps there were no reserves to speak of. We had no choice but to engage the 19th Army, which had not yet completed concentration.

The Front Command decided to strike in the Vitebsk sector with the available forces of the 19th Army and part of the right flank corps of the 20th Army.

19th Army Commander Konev tried to organise the counter-offensive on July 10 and 11. He committed the 220th Motorised Infantry Division and a regiment of the 229th Infantry Division of the 20th Army to the attack, but the enemy had such distinctly superior numbers that our force recoiled eastward on July 12. All the same, the action was fruitful, because it drove advance enemy units back to Vitebsk and held up the offensive of the main nazi forces in the Vitebsk-Rudnya and Vitebsk-Surazh-Vitebsk sectors for some time.

The 7th and 20th Panzer divisions and other units supported by a considerable force of planes, chiefly dive-bombers, kept up their pressure in the 19th Army sector all through July 11 and 12, attacking in strength in two directions—Vitebsk-Demidov and Vitebsk-Rudnya.

It was at this point that I came to 19th Army HQ, located in a forest north of Rudnya, where I met Lt.-Gen. Konev, Member of the Military Council Ivan Shekhanov and the Army's Chief of Staff, Mj.-Gen. Pyotr Rubtsov.

Konev and I set out to visit the front-line troops. He went to the troops near Vitebsk and I to the right flank, near Surazh, where one infantry division was dispositioned. There was no contact with the division by that time because it was surrounded. Near Kolyshki I encountered an infantry and an artillery regiment of another division, which had orders to advance on Surazh. The nazis had already captured the town by then, lunged out to Velizh and seized the latter as well. The right flank of the 19th Army lay bare. I gave orders for the infantry and artillery regiments to cover the Ponizovye-Kolyshki line and prevent an enemy attack on the Army's uncovered flank. Then I returned to HQ to see how the troops were coming up.

Mj.-Gen. Rubtsov told me an order had arrived for the 19th Army to move to a new line some 50-60 kilometres behind the original one. The order wrought havoc with

our troop control, because some of the divisions had already tackled the enemy, and had now to be disengaged.

The incomprehensible decision depressed me. For no good reason we had to abandon an area 50 to 60 km in depth. There was no telephone contact with Front Headquarters, however, and I took my car to get there myself. I reached Marshal Timoshenko before sun-up. He had just gone to bed, but I roused him and told him of the exasperating order.

"There must have been some mistake," the Marshal said. "Please go back immediately and restore the situation."

I returned at once to the Rudnya area. My liaison force consisted of just two aides, Khirnikh and Parkhomenko, and two signals officers with motorcars. En route, I flagged down ten motorcyclists and ordered them to follow me, intending to use them as couriers.

The redeployment of staffs, and partly of troops, proceeded chiefly along the Vitebsk-Smolensk highway and it was easy, therefore, to stop them. But we failed to reach the staff of the 34th Infantry Corps. The Corps Commander had left his troops near Vitebsk and withdrew his IIQ 60 km as ordered.

We picked a spot one kilometre north-west of Rudnya, 150 metres from the Vitebsk highway for our forward command post. The 19th Army operations group was positioned 18-19 kilometres away towards Smolensk.

Enemy troops, glutted with panzers, were thrusting out in two directions—Vitebsk-Velizh and Vitebsk-Demidov.

The sun hung low over the horizon when German panzers were sighted in the Rudnya area. They followed the road to the town passing close by my command post. When I heard the firing, which was nothing like the firing of field artillery, I sent a liaison officer in a car to see what was happening. Some 3 kilometres from my command post, at a turning of the road, he drove headlong into a nazi panzer column, at the head of which three nazi officers were driving in a passenger car.

My liaison officer, who was a resourceful man, leapt out of his car, threw a hand-grenade at the nazi car, dived into the tall wheat at the side of the road and ran back to warn us.

The German panzers were held up a few minutes by the damaged car, and then resumed their advance on Rudnya.

They drew level with our CP before my liaison officer reached us. They fired fanwise sporadically at the road ahead. German planes raced past overhead, bombing and strafing the land in front of the panzers.

We were located in a declivity densely overgrown with bushes, somewhat away from the road. Our vehicles were securely concealed by the dense rye, and the approach road from the highway to the command post was far away.

When the enemy panzers were some 500 metres from Rudnya two staff cars left the town, heading in their direction. They did not suspect any danger. When the passengers spotted the panzers, they jumped out of the cars and ran to the firing positions of an anti-tank battery on the edge of the town. A few guns opened fire immediately. The head panzer stopped, while the others assumed formation to right and left of it, engaging our battery. But it kept shooting, and held them in check. The people who had warned the battery, got back into their cars, turned off the highway and drove on along a dirt road. Later, we found out that the passengers were Lt.-Gen. Ivan Konev and Brigade Commissar Anatoly Shustin, Commander and Political Chief of the 19th Army, respectively. Shustin was wounded in the scrimmage. The two officers had set out to see the forward units and meant to visit our command post on the way. Then, having run into the enemy panzers, Konev had quickly organised resistance.

At the approaches to Rudnya the forward panzer stopped again, and shelled the railway station and town. The column of motorised infantry following the panzers stopped, too, and readied for battle. Heavy machine guns went into action. German submachine-gunners scrambled forward.

There was only one thing we could do: head northward. An open unprotected space of 150-200 metres lay ahead. I told my driver, Demyanov, to zigzag until we reached the tall rye. Khirnikh and Parkhomenko got into the car beside me. The rest also prepared to withdraw—some in cars, some on motorcycles, and some on foot.

The nazis had no inkling that the command post of the Deputy Front Commander was a stone's throw away. The

cannon of their panzers and their machine guns were not trained in our direction, and our manoeuvre succeeded. A few bursts of submachine-gun fire resounded behind us, but all of us escaped unhurt. General Konev, however, thought I had been killed, and reported accordingly to Front Headquarters.

From Rudnya our command post shifted to an area where the 16th Army, under Lt.-Gen. Mikhail Lukin, was taking up positions. It was near Zhukovka state farm, 12 km north of Smolensk along the Minsk-Moscow highway. The command post was situated in a wood on a small height, with a good view of the terrain to the west of us.

The Army's Chief of Staff, Col. Mikhail Shalin, handed me a message from Marshal Timoshenko:

"Personal,

"Comrade A. I. Eremenko:

"Front Headquarters is moving to the Yartsevo area. You are to remain in the Smolensk area to co-ordinate action of the 16th, 20th and 19th armies, and to render them every assistance they may need.

"Timoshenko."

Acting on these instructions, we organised our own command post next to Army IIQ. All I had was four staff officers (two aides and two operational officers) and several couriers on motorcycles. We used the Army HQ communication facilities.

This gave me a chance to get acquainted with the 16th Army, which took a major part in the defence of Smolensk. Its Commander, Mikhail Lukin, was a splendid general.

The 16th Army was formed in the Transbaikal territory in Siberia, in the summer of 1940, and was properly tempered there, because the conditions were very severe.

At the end of May the Army received redislocation orders. At first, it was dispatched to the Transcaucasus near the Iran border. But new orders arrived while it was still en route. It was first deployed to the Orel Military District, and then to the Kiev Special Military District.

When the war was imminent and the enemy was poised to strike, the forward units of the 16th Army—the 5th Mechanised Corps (of about 1,300 tanks), a separate tank

brigade (300 tanks) and the 32nd Infantry Corps—began concentrating in their assigned area. The Commander of the 16th Army was in Vinnitsa when the war broke out. In the afternoon of June 22, one of the corps commanders brought him a communication from the People's Commissar for Defence. "The Germans are provoking us into starting a war," it said. "This morning they bombed our cities and crossed our frontier at a number of points. You are ordered to drive the impudent invaders out of our territory. However, do not cross the border."

When the fighting began, Lukin had to see to the defence of Shepetovka, while the main force was ordered to entrain and proceed to the Smolensk area. It was not until July 5 that General Lukin himself came to Smolensk. At that time, the 16th Army consisted of just two infantry divisions, the 46th and 152nd, while all its other units were handed over to the 20th Army.

Brigade Commissar Alexei Lobachov, an experienced and capable political officer who had been with the Red Army for years, was the 16th Army's Member of the Military Council. Col. Mikhail Shalin, a Civil War veteran who had gone to a military academy and accumulated valuable experience as a staff officer, was the Army's Chief of Staff. He was the first of the Army's commanders to reach Smolensk, and had the situation there at his fingertips.

When I came to the 16th Army, its 152nd Division was spread from the junction of the Orsha and Vitebsk roads along Kasplya River to Gusino Station. It was a close-knit and efficient force, consisting chiefly of men from the Urals. Its commander, Col. Pyotr Chernyshov, an old Communist Party member and Civil War veteran, was a firm and resourceful officer. In the few days since its arrival in the new sector the division had built good fortifications and shored up panzer-vulnerable points.

Mj.-Gen. Alexander Filatov's 46th Infantry Division held a line running from Kholm through Syr to Lipki.

I spoke to Chernyshov and Filatov about my experiences of combat and co-operation, and recommended, among other things, to form flying squads like the ones we employed at Gorodok in the 22nd Army sector. These squads, I said, ought to include infantry detachments, guns, tanks or armoured cars and mortars. Considering the weakness

of our defences and the absence of reserves and fortifications in depth, flying squads helped to reinforce the line and had a capacity for incisive lightning counter-attacks. General Lukin, said on the strength of his experiences at Shepetovka that groups breaking out of various pockets in scattered lots should at once be put under his command.

By July 10 a Western Sector was formed, of which Marshal Timoshenko was made Commander-in-Chief. I was appointed Deputy Commander. Troops of both the Western and Reserve Fronts were put under the Western Sector command.

At that time the 31st infantry and seven tank and four motorised divisions were deployed for combat, accounting for half the strength allotted to the Front. Altogether, the Front consisted of seven general armies (the 22nd, 20th, 13th, 21st, 16th, 4th and 19th), of which the 22nd, 20th, 13th and 21st were assigned to the first operational echelon.

The remnants of the 4th Army, recovering after hard-fought battles, were being concentrated in the second echelon at Krychev and Novozybkov, and the 16th Army began concentrating in the Smolensk area.

At the same time, preparations were underway to move the Reserve Front to the Ostashkov-Selizharovo-Dnieper-Dorogobuzh-Yelna-Desna River-Zhukovka line, with some of the units between Kalinin, Volokolamsk and Maly Yaroslavl.

The first echelon of the Western Front had just 145 tanks, 1,200 guns of 76 and more mm, about 1,700 mortars and 380 serviceable planes.

Let us look more closely now at the state of the troops. We have already dealt with the 22nd Army holding the right flank of the Front, and shall now examine the 20th Army of Lt.-Gen. Pavel Kurochkin.

The 20th was somewhat better off than the others, because it had been deployed for action in good time and was more fully manned. Its operational density too, was more satisfactory—10-12 km per division.

The Army faced an advancing force of motorised and panzer troops. They struck along a narrow front at its flanks creating the danger of encirclement; however, the 20th was able to manoeuvre, rushing in troops from unmolested points.

All the general armies of the first echelon along the Western Front were also of satisfactory strength with 8 to 10 thousand men per division. However, there was a distinct shortage of mortars, 76-mm guns and 122-mm howitzers. The anti-tank weapons consisted chiefly of 45-mm guns.

At the time under review no more than 50-60 per cent of the troops had been properly deployed for combat and their organised defences lacked the necessary depth. The second echelons and reserves existed chiefly on paper, being either in the act of concentration or not battleworthy.

Defences were being taken up hastily, and were therefore badly fortified, save for the Mogilev area. The limiting points between the armies were especially weak.

Almost no radio communication facilities existed, and it was impossible to build up stable, sufficiently rapid troop control owing to the continuously changing situation.

The shortage of AA-guns and fighter planes made the anti-aircraft defences quite unsatisfactory.

The Western Front Command had the assignment of checking Army Group Centre, considerably superior in strength and matériel. The 40 Western Front divisions fully deployed by this time, faced 55 advancing German divisions. The enemy outnumbered us 2.4 to 1. The gun and mortar ratio was 2.4 to 1 as well, and enemy planes were in complete control of the air.

The nazis were striking simultaneously along a wide front stretching from Idritsa to Bykhov. This compelled us to scatter our reserves, of which we had too little, and gave the enemy an opportunity of massing powerful armoured forces in narrow fronts, with concentrated support, particularly that of the Luftwaffe. The 2nd Panzer Group, for example, was advancing along a front no more than 190 km wide, striking at two areas with an aggregate frontage of just 70 km.

At the sectors of the main attack panzer density amounted to as many as 30 vehicles per kilometre, giving the nazis overwhelming numerical odds.

On July 10 the advancing 10th and 18th panzer and 29th motorised divisions crowded as many as 350 panzers on a frontage of 37 kilometres against our 18th, 53rd and 110th infantry divisions, which had no tanks at all.

Tense fighting continued until July 13 and 14.

The 22nd Army retired eastward to avoid certain flanking attacks. The enemy's 3rd Panzer Group, rolling towards Velizh and the area north of it, pressed the 22nd Army more and more away from its left neighbour, the 20th Army. Then the capture of Velizh and of the area north of Demidov enabled two panzer divisions of the 3rd Panzer Group to swarm into the rear of the 20th and 16th Armies. The 12th Panzer Division drove a wedge into the defences of the 20th Army's 69th Infantry Corps, but soon we managed to neutralise the break-through.

An unpleasant situation was arising at the junction of the 20th and 13th Armies. Guderian's panzer forces jabbed painfully there and ripped our defences to shreds. The units subjected to the panzer thrusts retreated and turned their flanks. A gap appeared between the 13th and 20th Armies, of which the enemy instantly took advantage, developing his advance at Gorki-Krasnoye. How well we could have used mechanised corps there to strike back!

Admittedly, the 21st Army advanced somewhat towards Bobruisk. On the insistence of the High Command, we issued the order for an offensive. The specific task was to cut off the forward enemy force from its rear in the Gorodok-Vitebsk and Orsha-Shklov sectors, and to stabilise the front. The nazi group at Velizh was to be dislodged and Guderian's mechanised troops at Gorki, Mstislavl and Shklov were to be smashed.

The 22nd Army was to strike towards Gorodok Vitebsk, and by nightfall on July 16 the 19th Army was to capture Vitebsk. By that time the 20th would have closed the frontal breach in the Orsha-Shklov sector and hit Gorki in the night of July 14, cutting off the panzer force that had broken into the area. These operations were to be supported by the 13th Army, dispositioned along the Basya River. The 4th and 16th Armies were committed to help wipe out the enemy group at Gorki. Besides, two divisions of the 16th Army were to engage an advancing enemy force in the vicinity of the Smolensk-Yartsevo road.

Some of our divisions counter-attacked in the morning on July 15, but made no palpable headway. Just the 20th Army's 1st Motorised Infantry Division made the enemy's 18th Panzer Division give ground somewhat 20 km east

of Orsha. The action mounted by the 69th Infantry and 5th Mechanised Corps collapsed.

The 4th and 13th armies, exclusive of the 61st Infantry Corps, were unable to join in the counter-offensive. Involved in difficult defensive battles, they were compelled to withdraw across the Basya and Sozh rivers, and were put under the joint command of Lt.-Gen. Gerasimenko, Commander of the 13th Army.

Towards the evening of July 15 the 2nd and 3rd Panzer Groups and 9th Field Army attempted to close the pocket round the 20th, 19th and 16th armies by converging thrusts, capture Smolensk and open the road to Moscow. To cover this operation from the south, the enemy advanced on Yelna and Dorogobuzh.

Part of our 19th Army withdrew towards Smolensk and Yartsevo, and the rest concentrated east of Smolensk.

The Nazi plan of crushing our group in the Smolensk area was designed to be a new "Cannes" for our forces. The enemy struck out in strength from Vitebsk at Dukhovshchina-Yartsevo and from the Krasnoye-Gorki sector in the south at Smolensk and Zaborye. The thrust from Vitebsk was by Hoth's panzer troops, and that from the south by Guderian's.

The Soviet operational position in the Smolensk area was highly unfavourable. For all this, our troops showed courage, mobility and tenacity, and prevented the enemy from carrying out his designs.

By the evening of July 15, Hoth's 7th Panzer Division, which had strong air support, reached north of Yartsevo and cut the Smolensk-Moscow highway. The enemy landed a force of paratroopers there as well. This meant that the Soviet troops in the Smolensk area were enveloped deeply from the east and cut off from their main supply line.

Our command in the area had no reserves to counter-attack and stiffen the defences, thus to avert a follow-up by the enemy on Smolensk or Vyazma.

On July 16 the Commander-in-Chief of the Western Sector reported to the High Command that we had "insufficient strength to cover Yartsevo, Vyazma and Moscow. The main thing, no tanks".

Having concluded my business in the 16th Army area, I headed for Yartsevo, not knowing yet that it was threat-

ened by the enemy, to report the state of affairs to Marshal Timoshenko. I had barely passed along the motor road at dawn on July 16 when it was cut by enemy panzers advancing from Dukhovshchina. Front Headquarters had already moved from Yartsevo to somewhere around Vyazma. I sent my report off with a liaison officer and occupied myself with organising a counter-attack. Mj.-Gen. Vasily Yushkevich, Commander of the 44th Infantry Corps, who was in the Yartsevo area (all in all, he had some three infantry and as many artillery regiments), was instructed to defend the right bank of the Vop River. At the same time, we gathered what was left of the 38th Infantry Division and other available units into a group under Brigade Commander Alexander Gorbatov, and formed a group of two battalions and a few tanks under Brigade Commander Pavel Kiselev, chief of the 20th Army rearguard. These succeeded in driving the enemy off the motor road.

We could hardly expect anything more substantial from our depleted, hastily armed and heterogeneous troops. I asked the Commander-in-Chief for reinforcements and was allowed to take the 110th Motorised Infantry Division from the 16th Army. In addition, the Reserve Front gave us the 69th Tank Division. However, it would take some time for the reinforcements to reach us, while the enemy was eager to exploit his success.

By the evening of July 10 enemy panzers lunged into Smolensk from the south and captured the southern part of the city. On the same day the 7th Panzer Division took possession of Yartsevo. Now the 20th and 16th armies, whom I had been ordered to control, and the 19th Army as well, were fenced off from the main communication line and semi-encircled. We maintained contact with the rear across marshland south of Yartsevo through Solovyovo.

Our 110th motorised infantry and 69th tank divisions were to attack Dukhovshchina at dawn on July 18, smash the 7th Panzer Division and reach Smolensk. But the divisions failed in their mission. For various reasons, their attack began at different times, and was generally delayed. The enemy made the most of the opportunity to develop his advance.

At this point, I think it is worthwhile relating an episode

which occurred in the first half of July. Regrettably, some of the details have by now escaped my memory.

We received a telephone message from Supreme Headquarters

"It is planned to use 'ar esses' against the nazis, and we have to test them in combat. You shall have one M 8 battalion to test them and shall report your judgement."

I wondered what these "ar esses" were. None of the other officers had ever heard of them either. It was only after the M 8 battalion arrived that we learned that they were mobile rocket installations. Shortly before the war, when I was chairman of a state commission testing new types of weapons, I had seen them, but at that time they were not called "ar esses", nor katyushas. The ones that came to our sector had high explosive anti personnel mines.

We tried the new weapon at Rudnya. In the afternoon of July 15, 1941, the weird screech of the jet propelled mines slashed the air. They flew like red tailed comets. The frequent and powerful explosions that followed, stunned ear and eye with roar and blinding flame.

The effect of 320 mines exploding simultaneously in about 10 seconds was overwhelming and surpassed our expectations. Enemy soldiers bolted. Our own soldiers, too, those who were in the front lines near the explosions, backed as well (for to keep the weapon secret, nobody had been warned of the test).

This was one of the first trials of rocket artillery in battle. I sent the Supreme Command a detailed description of what I saw. The men commended our new weapon highly.

We lost the southern section of Smolensk on July 16, 1941, because we had not yet learned by then to defend large towns with small forces, especially a local garrison. In the Second World War towns could be turned at fairly short notice into strongpoints which the enemy found difficult to overwhelm, even with powerful air, tank and artillery support.

Fortified stone buildings and their cellars, barricades and anti tank fortifications in the streets, particularly in the central part of the town, where streets form narrow bottlenecks, could contain a large enemy force.

The Smolensk Party organisation headed by First Secre-

tary D. M. Popov had by then evacuated the city's industries and other valuable property, and most of the population. The city's anti-aircraft defences, supervised by Vakhterov, Chairman of the Smolensk City Soviet, functioned quite well.

For all this, the preparations made by the municipal and regional authorities to defend the city were insufficient. The same may be said of the measures taken by Col. Malyshev, chief of the city garrison, who tried forming a division of local volunteers, but formed no more than an understrength brigade. Yet the real reason for our failure lay chiefly in our lack of experience in defending towns. If preparations had begun earlier, there would have been every chance to build up resistance, for we could have used the local militia, the N.K.V.D. troops, and local volunteers.

The backbone in the Smolensk area, as I said earlier, consisted of the 46th and 152nd infantry divisions of the 16th Army. The left flank of the 152nd being exposed, Lukin formed a mobile detachment a few days before the fall of Smolensk. It consisted of an infantry battalion, two companies of engineers, a battalion of 76-mm guns and a battalion of 122-mm howitzers. He placed the group southwest of Smolensk at Krasnoye. Lt.-Col. Pavel Bunyashin was put in command. Col. Malyshev's brigade, consisting of a militia battalion and three battalions of Smolensk volunteers, was sent to organise defences on the Voskresensk-Opolye line.

The Army's artillery chief, Mj.-Gen. Trofim Vlasov, went with the brigade to reconnoitre and organise its defences.

On July 9, Bunyashin's detachment engaged an enemy motorcycle regiment at Krasnoye. The nazis were ambushed on the march and almost entirely wiped out. Prisoners were taken and about 100 motorcycles were captured. The prisoners said they had been told Soviet troops had abandoned Smolensk and were sent to occupy the city. The other regiments of their division attacked our 57th Tank Division north-west of Krasnoye. If we had not moved our motorised detachment to Krasnoye, the motorcyclists would have entered Smolensk on July 9 and made the situation of the 16th, 20th and 19th armies all but disastrous. Mj.-Gen. T. Vlasov was killed in the battle against the nazi motorcycle regiment.

Our 46th Infantry Division engaged the enemy's 7th Panzer Division on the right flank on July 13 and held it in check for three days and nights in face of savage artillery-supported attacks. Our division mounted many counter-attacks and the enemy suffered heavy losses. The enemy artillery headquarters were routed and important papers were captured.

In the morning of July 15 the enemy rushed fresh troops and a large number of panzers into the battle and did considerable damage to the 46th. The fighting proceeded all that day within the defence zone, and at night the division abandoned Demidov.

Malyshev's brigade, Bunyashin's detachment and the left flank units of the 152nd Division fought uninterruptedly against an impatient enemy until July 15. That day the enemy finally captured Krasnoye. Fatigued and greatly depleted, the Malyshev and Bunyashin units retreated to Smolensk. After nightfall, on July 15, the enemy swept our weak force out of his way and entered the southern part of Smolensk. Col. Malyshev promptly blew up the city bridges across the Dnieper. At that time he was censured for doing so without orders from his superiors. In retrospect across a space of 20 years, I think Malyshev did a great service to the 16th, 20th and 19th armies, because not so much as a company was available in reserve at the time to defend the bridges.

Having taken Demidov, the enemy advanced on Yartsevo and to the Solovyovo crossing, which was later to gain fame on the Western Front. There were no troops east of Smolensk along the Smolensk-Moscow railway, south of the railway and north-east along the Moscow-Minsk highway, to prevent the enemy from crossing the Dnieper and then advancing in any direction he pleased, creating a perilous situation for our three armies.

General Lukin learned about the nazis' capturing the southern part of Smolensk at 1.30 p.m. on July 16 from the Deputy Chief of the Army's Political Department, who had been sent to the city with a group of staff officers to mobilise civilians for the building of anti-tank obstacles.

On learning the bad news, Lukin and Lobachov, Member of the Army's Military Council, went by car to the Dnieper bridge in Smolensk. The city, he told me later, lay in

ominous silence as they drove along the streets. But as soon as they came nearer the river, several machine guns opened fire. It took some effort to find the detachments of Malyshev and Bunyashin, whose men, who were at the end of their tether after the battles, were fast asleep. Lukin ordered the troops to occupy the houses along the river embankment and to keep firing in order to let the enemy know the bank was in Soviet hands.

The 46th Infantry Division was ordered to shift post-haste to the left flank and straddle the Smolensk-Moscow railway. By an agreement with Konev, it had been relieved by elements of the 19th Army. Lukin related recently that after he had organised the defence of the river with the available troops, he and Lobachov sat down on a hillock where the road to Smolensk branched away from the Minsk-Moscow highway and deliberated on what to do next and where to get at least one more infantry and one artillery regiment. The 46th Division was being deployed to a crucial sector and they could not borrow any troops from it. The 152nd, too, was fighting off enemy attacks. There was no reserve. "What about the Army's Headquarters companies and logistics units?" they wondered. But these had already been formed into a detachment and sent to Yartsevo.

As in a fairy-tale, salvation came at the eleventh hour in the person of a smart-looking, taller-than-average, handsome dark-haired man in the uniform of a Major-General, who introduced himself as Gorodnyansky, Commander of the 129th Infantry Division. His troops, consisting of two infantry and one artillery regiment, were gathering just then in a wood a kilometre away from the forking. Gorodnyansky's division was part of the 19th Army, which was backing away eastward after some hard-fought battles.

General Gorodnyansky heard Lukin's account of the situation, and said:

"Give your orders."

The division was assigned to the Dnieper bank in the centre, with the 46th on its left flank and the 152nd on the right.

In subsequent battles for Smolensk and east of the city the 129th acquitted itself splendidly. Until July 20 the division bore the brunt of the defensive fighting. It is barely

conceivable today how this depleted command of different units, lacking sufficient artillery, mortars and machine guns, and, moreover, poorly supplied with ammunition, managed to charge and obliterate nazi positions in the northern outskirts of Smolensk, though lacking resources to consolidate captured territory. Each time, strong enemy counter-attacks supported by heavy gun and mortar fire, compelled the division to withdraw to its initial line. Yet its troops persevered day and night with determination of the highest order in assaulting the nazis. Men, commanders and political officers of all ranks displayed wholesale heroism. Division Commander Gorodnyansky proved to be a thorough, knowledgeable and eminently brave man.

We had been lucky on July 16 that the motorised enemy division which had lunged into Smolensk decided to wait for the arrival of the main force before crossing the Dnieper. When it tried crossing the next day, the left bank was quite securely defended by three Soviet divisions. Between July 17 and 22, inclusive, the nazis attempted crossing every day at different points, but in vain.

The 129th and 152nd divisions endeavoured to regain a foothold on the right bank of the Dnieper and hammer the enemy out of the southern part of Smolensk. The 152nd managed to cross the river, but an enemy counter-attack drove it back to the left bank.

When the 19th Army disengaged and retired for regrouping after the hard-fought battles for Vitebsk, its 34th Infantry Corps under Mj.-Gen. Khmelnitsky, consisting of the 127th and 158th divisions, was inducted into the 16th Army. The Corps was concentrated on the left bank of the Dnieper, south of the 46th Division.

In the early morning of July 23 the enemy finally succeeded in crossing to the left bank near the city cemetery, at the limiting point between the 129th and 152nd divisions. Fierce street fighting ensued. The troops fought for every house and for every floor. The fighting for the cemetery and airfield, which kept changing hands for all of a week, was particularly bitter.

The enemy kept up a withering bombardment and sent in a large number of panzers and planes. Deplorably, the 16th Army had neither tanks nor aircraft of its own, for its 5th Mechanised Corps and 57th Tank Division, which

hailed from the Transbaikal territory, had been handed over to the 20th Army.

The gallant 16th suffered tremendous losses in a grueling succession of battles. After the nazis seized the crossings at Yartsevo it received no supplies of ammunition and food for several days. The unit consisting of its staff and logistics officers, was almost entirely wiped out.

Yet, even in those harrowing days, the idea of recapturing Smolensk was uppermost in our minds. We had Khmelnitsky's Corps mount an offensive south of the city and the 152nd Division from around Gnezdovo. The Dnieper crossing went off successfully and the Corps came close to the southern outskirts of Smolensk. The 152nd Division also managed to send a battalion across the river, but that was as far as it got.

With panzer support and a strong air umbrella, the nazis counter-attacked the 34th Corps. They bore down on it in force and flung it back across the Dnieper. Its plight was next to disastrous, and doubly so, because its commander fell sick and troop control relaxed. This, among other things, prevented the Corps from fulfilling its mission. I came to restore order in troop control.

In the meantime, a strong nazi motorised force with air support struck at the 152nd Division west of Gnezdovo. Patrols had spotted the nazi concentration in good time. His vigilance blunted by his success, the enemy showed lack of caution, and this gave us an opportunity to make him pay for it. The columns of nazi vehicles gathered in a sparse wood a short distance from our division's forward line of defence in open daylight. The 152nd began with a short but stiff shelling, then went over the top and smashed the enemy in a swift scuffle. Its units lunged into the city in their respective sectors and slowly but surely recovered house after house and block after block in gory street battles. The division moved steadily forward, although some of the buildings, converted into strongholds, were still in enemy hands in its rear.

The 129th Infantry Division, too, burst into the city. Fierce fighting raged in the streets all along the front. If we had had a few more guns and mortars and if the 34th Corps had been successful in its mission, the tide would have indubitably turned in our favour at Smolensk.

By July 23 a substantial part of Smolensk was cleared of the enemy, and on July 25 Soviet troops took possession of the whole northern part of the city, occupied the railway station and reached the Dnieper. However, the attempt to cross the river and recapture the southern part of Smolensk failed.

The 16th Army fought for Smolensk for nearly three weeks against a numerically superior enemy who had panzers and planes, of which the Soviet troops had none at all. Not only did it counter-attack, but struck telling counter-blows in its efforts to recapture the city. The result was that Army Group Centre's objective of surrounding the 16th, 19th and 20th Armies was foiled.

The 20th Army withdrew to the line of the 16th Army, and afforded cover to its right flank. This appeared to stabilise the situation somewhat. But it was no more than seeming stability. The enemy was busy regrouping his forces. On July 28 the situation of the 20th Army deteriorated sharply. A powerful enemy panzer and air drive breached its defences. The 152nd and part of the 129th infantry divisions faced the threat of envelopment in Smolensk. The 152nd swung its right flank at an acute angle and the 129th put a cover detachment across the Moscow-Minsk highway.

At about 4 p.m. panzers appeared from the north east. This made the situation tenuous for the 16th Army. To avoid encirclement, its divisions had to abandon Smolensk and retreat. They did so in the night of July 28. However, some 16th Army units were still fighting near the north eastern outskirts on July 30, hoping against hope that a general offensive would be mounted any day.

In the course of the fighting from July 9 onwards, the 16th Army received no reinforcements to speak of, save 2,000 men. It had five divisions, but these were drastically understrength. The logistical units of the Army and its divisions were reduced to the bare minimum. All who could hold a rifle were sent into the lines. The corps staffs were disbanded altogether. Ammunition supplies were air-dropped. Gun and mortar crews, and machine-gunners, were ordered to economise on ammunition and to hold their fire until absolutely certain of their target; they were instructed to fire in extreme cases only. This was a time when

men, commanders and political officers had to summon all their stamina, courage, resourcefulness and devotion, and, I might add, they acquitted themselves splendidly.

On July 19, 1941, I was reappointed Commander of the Western Front. Divisional Commissar Dmitry Lestev was appointed Member of the Military Council and Lt.-Gen. Herman Malandin was made Chief of Staff.

By this time the Battle of Smolensk had served its useful purpose to the full. The enemy was blocked and had suffered considerable casualties. We, for our part, had won a valuable month. Now, with our armies in a pocket, there was no point in involving ourselves in further long-drawn battles for the city, for that would only weaken our outer ring, where the enemy was continuously building up his strength. It would probably result in a tightening of the nazi ring and spell ultimate disaster for our two armies.

The Soviet troops in the Smolensk area had done a great service, which the nation is not likely ever to forget. They had struck the first effective blow against Hitler's blitzkrieg strategy. They stemmed the enemy and compelled the nazis to alter their offensive plans, cutting the ground from under their tactics of lightning advance. It was up to us now to lead our armies out of the pocket, retire to new lines and avoid a crushing enemy blow.

Speaking of the battles in and around Smolensk, I must mention the 57th Tank Division under Col. Vasily Mishulin, which had at first been part of the 16th Army and done well from the start, particularly east of Borisov, where it supported Kreizer's division. By mid-July the 57th no longer disposed of the 114th and 115th tank regiments. The former had lost its tanks in the fighting at Shepetovka, and the latter had been transferred to the 20th Army.

Shortly before the nazis captured Smolensk, the 57th made a whirlwind manoeuvre to Krasnoye village and pounced on the enemy, who was trying to follow through.

Col. Vasily Mishulin was a model for his men. Wounded and badly shell-shocked, he refused to leave the field of battle and gave his troops skilful leadership, taking them out of the enemy pocket and inflicting heavy losses on the nazis.

I was briefed about the exploits of Mishulin's tank force. Army Commanders Lukin and Kurochkin, too, told me



V. A. Mishulin

a lot about it. We recommended Mishulin for the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and the military rank of general.

We had a laugh over it, too, because my dispatch was misread. The message ended with the following words: "... Recommend Colonel Mishulin for the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and the military rank of General. Lt Gen. Eremenko." Transmitted in code, it read: "... Recommend Colonel Mishulin for the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and the military rank of Lieutenant-General. Eremenko."

Reading a newspaper a few days later, I learned that Vasily Mishulin was promoted to Tank Lieutenant General, instead of Major-General.

By that time the body of Red Army officers had largely acquired the qualities essential to combat the strong enemy. Our officers had the fighting spirit, the devotion and the military prowess to afford the troops effective leadership. In the difficult days of the nazi assault, they learned to combat a mobile, strong and numerically superior enemy. They learned the hard way, it is true, but all the more adequately.

The main thing was to learn to manoeuvre formations and units, and to counter-attack audaciously. Besides, we

were bent on inculcating two other qualities that I, for one, considered absolutely essential.

The first was to care for the welfare of the subordinate troops. First and foremost, all officers worth their salt put their troops in as favourable a position as possible vis-à-vis the enemy, gained as much of an advantage as they could, organised the fighting themselves, kept teaching the troops to fight, inspiring them by their presence, and saw to it that logistical supplies were unintermittent and adequate.

The second was continuous and correct briefing of the superior officer about their own situation, and that of the enemy. Properly informed, the superior officer is able to pick the more desirable course of action and avoid exposing troops to needless risks.

But let us go back to the general situation in the Western Front at the close of July.

Hard engagements were being fought at the time all along the front. Particularly ferocious fighting raged in and around Yartsevo on July 19 and 20. The town changed hands several times. Our 101st Motorised Infantry Division, engaged there, was unable to achieve a decisive success. It was badly outnumbered, and the enemy had superior air and mortar strength. Our attacks were foiled by stiff nazi resistance.

All the same, the enemy was slowed down and fixed. He was prevented from sealing the pocket round the Soviet troops east of Smolensk and from pursuing his offensive on Dorogobuzh and Vyazma.

The situation south-east of Smolensk grew precarious between July 19 and 21. The forward units of the 10th Panzer Division advancing on Vyazma, reached Yelna on July 19, and the 19th Infantry Division of our 24th Army, which was stationed there, failed to stem it. Yelna was captured, and the enemy thus obtained a springboard jutting far east into our lines.

The nazis' reaching the Velikiye Luki-Yartsevo-Yelna line made the situation at the Western Front, which had practically no reserves left, doubly precarious. So Supreme Headquarters issued a directive on July 20, that troops of the Reserve Front in the Western Sector should join in

the fighting and tilt the numerical ratio at some points in our favour.

The 29th, 30th, 24th and 28th armies, which were completing deployment along a line from Ostashkov through Rzhev and Yelna to Bryansk, received orders to mount an offensive with part of their forces in order to smash the enemy north and south of Smolensk in conjunction with troops of the 20th and 16th armies.

The 29th Army was ordered to advance from south of Toropets with three infantry divisions in a south-westerly direction, and to wipe out the Smolensk-Yartsevo enemy force in collaboration with the 30th Army. The 30th Army received the same task and was to send three infantry divisions under Mj. Gen. Vasily Khomenko from their initial positions south west of Bely.

Three infantry divisions (under Lt.-Gen. Stepan Kalinin) of the 24th Army and Lt.-Gen. Konstantin Rokossovsky's group of three infantry divisions were to advance from the Yartsevo area on Smolensk in close co-operation with the 30th Army.

Last but not least, two infantry divisions under Lt.-Gen. Vladimir Kachalov of the 28th Army were ordered to advance on Smolensk from the south-east, the Roslavl area.

Member of the Military Council Dmitry Lestev and I visited the 30th Army to help its command organise the offensive. Its Commander, Mj.-Gen. Khomenko, and many of his officers, had served previously with the border troops and were brave, disciplined and deeply devoted officers.

In addition to the 30th Army's own three divisions, Khomenko's task force included a division of the 19th Army and the 107th Motorised Infantry Division under Col. Dobruchev, which had some 200 tanks (of which more than half were the antiquated T-26s).

When approaching their initial assault positions, the divisions of the 30th Army were badly pounded by the Luftwaffe, but this did not stop them from assuming the offensive.

Harried continuously from the air, our troops concentrated on the start line after marches across virtually impassable terrain, and then jumped off. I visited each division at least once and noted with satisfaction that our men

were gradually gaining combat experience. I thought jubilantly that soon, very soon, the enemy would get his due.

The Soviet operation inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. As many as 700 nazis were killed, and more than 200 knocked-out panzers and armoured vehicles littered the path of the 107th Motorised Infantry Division alone, which advanced some 20 to 25 kilometres in four days of fighting. Acting on my instructions, Divisional Commander Col. Dobruchev had employed the following tactics. He sent the tanks forward in open formation. They passed the initial assault positions of the infantry and rolled toward the enemy line. Naturally, the enemy opened fire. This enabled our gunners to pinpoint the nazi firing positions and to retaliate effectively, affording the tanks appropriate cover. Then came the turn of our infantry to move forward.

This produced the following effect: the gun and tank shelling "advanced" in the van, followed by tanks, then infantry, with more guns moving up in the wake. Artillery covered the tanks, tanks covered the infantry, and infantry covered the artillery. Every 2- or 3-kilometre rush was followed by a tactical pause, which did not, however, interrupt the battle. Digging in at every newly reached point, the infantry kept up a sustained and deliberate fire, allowing the artillery to move up and organise new observation posts and firing positions, while the tanks refuelled and replenished their ammunition, and maintained stationary fire.

Today, such tactics are taken for granted, but we lacked battle experience at the time, for many of our officers had never before led their units in combat. The important thing was to teach them to organise co-operation and act purposefully.

The above positioning, which secured co-operation between infantry, tanks and artillery, proved effective.

The deep enemy defence called for well organised assaults. It could never have been pierced in a headlong thrust, no matter how well sustained.

This was how we threshed out methods of co-operation in offensive battles. They occurred to us in the battlefield and gave the troops an opportunity to show their mettle.

Many of the units showed extraordinary efficiency. I still have the rough copy of a note I wrote on the spot,

during the battle, to the top officers of the 237th Infantry Regiment. Here it is:

**"To Commander of 237th Regiment
Major Dobrovolsky,
Senior Political Instructor Gorbachov,
Chief-of-Staff Captain Kuzmin.**

"For meritorious conduct on July 28 and 29 when smashing the fascists you have been recommended for the Order of the Red Banner.

"Keep it up in the same Bolshevik spirit.

| | |
|---|---|
| "Lt. Gen. Eremenko, Commander of the Western Front | Commissar Lestev, Member of the Military Council July 29, 1941." |
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A striking episode occurred in a battle fought by the 107th Motorised Infantry Division, which I reported on July 30 to the Commander-in-Chief of the Western Sector. Let me quote my report:

"Handled by brave men. KV tanks can do wonders. In the sector of the 107th we sent a KV tank to silence an enemy anti-tank battery. It squashed the artillery, rolled up and down the enemy's gun emplacements, was hit more than 200 times, but its armour was not pierced, although a target for guns of all systems."

Often, our tanks went out of action due to the hesitant and unsure conduct of their crews, rather than direct hits. For this reason, we subsequently manned the KV tanks with hand-picked crews.

Stiff fighting continued unabated from July 20 to 28. We did not have sufficient strength to surround the enemy force in Smolensk, but were compelled to issue an order to this effect all the same on the insistence of the Supreme Command. It would have been fine if we had managed the task, because it would have stemmed the nazi advance and greatly relieved the 16th and 20th armies, which were all but enveloped. But unfortunately, the plan was unrealistic.

Alongside Khomenko's group, which I have already referred to briefly, offensive operations were undertaken by groups of the 29th and 24th armies, and by the group

under Rokossovsky. Their common objective was to annihilate the Smolensk enemy force.

Kachalov's group of a few 28th Army formations deployed with other formations to the forward zone also took an active part in the attempts to crush the Nazi force in and around Smolensk.

Units of the 28th Army had begun arriving in early July and were deployed along a wide frontage, forming what looked like a dotted second echelon line of the Western Front. The Army's right wing was north of Yelna and the left south of Bryansk. Every division was allotted a sector more than 45 km long to organise a fortified line of defence.

The staff of the Arkhangelsk Military District was assigned to the 28th Army, and arrived in the city of Kirov, Bryansk Region, in late July 1941. The Army's divisions were activated in different parts of the Soviet Union and began arriving in the first two weeks of July. The staff and its officers did not, for this reason, know the personnel at first hand. They studied the rolls when assuming control. Besides, many officers had been called up from the reserve. Yet the troops fought tenaciously and skilfully.

On the instructions of the General Staff, a slender shock force was built up of 28th Army troops in the Roslavl area after July 16, 1941, while the Army's main force remained in its previous positions without reinforcements to make up for the depletion. Lt.-Gen. Vladimir Kachalov, Commander of the 28th Army, was put at the head of the shock force, and in our operational messages we began calling it Kachalov's group. It was assigned an offensive operation and began preparing for its task while continuing deployment.

The enemy, too, was wasting no time. He reconnoitred continuously, bombed and strafed our troops, and was particularly troublesome along the Warsaw highway.

Kachalov's group consisted of the 149th and 145th infantry divisions and the 104th Tank Division. The 149th (under Mj.-Gen. Fyodor Zakharov), whose main force was on the left wing, had massed its vanguard along the Krutsovka-Samodidino-Starinka line by July 22. By that time the 145th, which arrived from Orel (under Mj. Gen. Alexander Volkhin), assumed defences along a front of

40km on the Desna River. Its commander was appointed chief of the Roslavl garrison with orders to maintain order in the city, for Roslavl was a point of transit for westward-bound troops and for a reverse stream of surviving elements of various units retiring for reorganisation after hard-fought battles or after breaking out of enemy pockets. All too often, the roads got jammed and, as the divisional commander related, it took considerable effort and ingenuity to restore traffic. An assembly point was organised for this purpose east of the town, where troops that had broken out of enemy pockets were reorganised and incorporated in the division. Valuable property was evacuated from the town, and military objectives were made ready for demolition.

In the morning of July 20 the 340th Infantry Regiment of the 145th Division was moved to the Pochinka area with orders to capture the airfield, and reached a line north and east of Stodolishche along the southern bank of the Stomet River by the end of the day, preventing enemy reconnaissance from infiltrating our front. The 340th, which was under the command of Col. Pyotr Metalnikov, was originally part of the 46th Infantry Division stationed before the war in Irkutsk. The other regiments of the 46th Division had had a taste of the fighting by the time the 340th arrived at Roslavl and was incorporated in the 145th Division.

Metalnikov was given orders to move to Pochinka at Kachalov's IIQ, which allotted him 200 motor vehicles for this purpose. The regiment reached its destination before dawn on July 20, but came under strong enemy artillery and mortar fire when taking up positions, for, evidently, nazi scouts had spotted its redislocation. Divisional commander Volkhin had come along to help Metalnikov organise control, and was present when the green regiment received its baptism of fire. Subsequently, Volkhin returned to divisional headquarters on the orders of the Army Commander to prepare the rest of the division for battle.

The 104th Tank Division was formed in the Turkestan Military District and put under the command of Col. Vasily Burkov. The division began arriving in sections to Kirovskaya (Fayansovaya) Station near Bryansk on July 11. After detraining, it marched to the Yelna area. On July 21 and 22 the division took part in the fighting for Yelna, giving

security support to the 19th Infantry Division, then retired from the battle on the Front Commander's orders to enter Kachalov's group. When pulling out of the Yelna area, the division, and particularly its 104th Motorised Infantry Regiment, was pounced on by the Luftwaffe, and the commander of one of the tank regiments was killed. By the evening of July 22 the division's main forces fought their way to the Borisovochka-Kovali area.

Kachalov's group, consisting of the 145th and 149th infantry and the 104th tank divisions, finally concentrated north of Roslavl. It was to mount an attack from Stodolishche Station-Derebuzh in the general direction of Smolensk along the Roslavl-Smolensk highway and envelop the city from the west. The force was expected to reach Smolensk by July 25. The objective, as formulated by the Supreme Command, was to co-operate with Khomenko's force advancing on Bely, Rokossovsky's group striking towards Yartsevo and the 20th Army, which operated from the north-west. The ultimate goal was to annihilate the enemy force in the Yartsevo, Smolensk, Dukhovshchina and Demidov area.

Kachalov touched off the attack in the morning on July 23 and flung nazi advance units across the Belichek and Stomet rivers by the afternoon. The 568th Infantry Regiment of his 149th Division reached a line from Guta, along the northern bank of the Belichek to Voroshilovo. The right wing of the 479th Rifle Regiment, in the meantime, seized the northern bank of the Stomet, south-west of Voroshilovo.

Here is what Hero of the Soviet Union Lt.-Gen. Fyodor Zakharov, Rtd., who commanded the 149th, recounts on this score:

"At first, the 149th Infantry Division held a 30-kilometre stretch along the Desna River, straddling the Warsaw highway. In mid-July it was ordered to march up 20 km from Roslavl through Zakharovo and Voroshilovo to Yakhroma and prevent the nazis from advancing on Yelna. The division marched in one column.

"On the third day of our move, July 22, 1941, our vanguard ran into gun and mortar fire when approaching Zakharovo village. It overran the enemy's forward line and mounted a battle for the village of Voroshilovo. The forward regiment [apparently the 568th.—A. E.], under Col. Pilinog,

broke up into battalions and continued the advance. The regimental commander and I drove to the vanguard troops. After the commander of the vanguard battalion had reported the situation, I ordered Col. Pilinog's two left-wing battalions to attack and capture Voroshilovo if the forward battalion would be stalled. The regiment was supported by a regiment of light artillery.

"Then we returned to the regiment's main force. In loose formation, two battalions enveloped Zakharovo village from west and east. The other regimental and battalion commanders were summoned to the edge of the village and instructed how to conduct themselves in this, the division's baptism of fire.

"Sixty Junkers-88 appeared in the sky at noon on July 22. They circled overhead and began bombing the village and its outskirts. Frankly speaking, the explosions were terrifying, but since this was the division's first battle, we had to inject courage and calm into the soldiers by our own example. They watched the general and colonel going about their business with apparent disregard for the bombs, and acted with greater assurance. The raid was soon over. Our losses were few.

"Lt.-Gen. Kachalov came to Zakharovo on July 23. He studied the reports of the reconnaissance troop and ordered us to step up the advance. I decided to attack Voroshilovo from two sides with two regiments at dawn on July 24, and instructed Col. Pankov, commander of the division's artillery, to shell the enemy's lines all night with guns and mortars, harassing the nazis and hindering them from building their firing system. The attack was set for 4 a.m., preceded by a ten-minute artillery bombardment.

"Our assault went off to a good start. The enemy suffered heavy losses. We took as many as 600 prisoners and captured a variety of matériel. Kachalov and I were driving from Zakharovo to Voroshilovo and met the column of prisoners being led to the rear. A few Junkerses swooped down on the column at that moment, killing more than a hundred of the POWs. The rest were brought to Group Headquarters.

"After this battle, the division advanced nearly 60 kilometres, meeting no serious resistance."

The 340th Regiment of the 145th Division shifted to the northern bank of the Stomet south of Leshchina Sloboda, while a battalion of the 729th Regiment occupied Poluyevo on the northern bank of the Stomet. Another battalion stayed on the southern bank, while the 403rd Infantry Regiment clung to its positions in the Novo-Derebuzh area.

At night on July 23 the reconnaissance battalion and a task force of the 145th Division set out to capture Maliye Khislovichi.

The division's story was told to me by its commander, Alexander Volkhin. Here is what he recounted:

"At 5 in the morning of July 19, I was summoned by Army Commander Kachalov. He asked me to pull out my map and curtly outlined the following task: the 145th Infantry Division was to attack the enemy on July 23 from its initial line from Stodolishche 4 km to the left, straddling the highway. It was to advance along the highway and capture the airfield at Engeldardovskaya. The 149th Infantry Division and the 104th Tank Division would be attacking on our right.

"I took it that the attack was planned in stride and asked for permission to move my division from the defence line and prepare it for the offensive as best I could in the available time. This was essential, I thought, because the left-wing regiments were some 40 to 50 kilometres from the assault line. Also, I asked for permission to drive at once to the initial position with the regimental and battalion commanders and staff officers who would organise combat. The General heard me out, and said: 'Do what you think is necessary to secure success, but do not break up the defences. You will get further instructions concerning deployment of units to the attack areas.' Kachalov wished me success and we shook hands warmly.

"All day long the regimental commanders and staff officers were busy planning and preparing for the battle, charting routes and selecting assault points. Patrols were sent out to check the routes and reconnoitre the enemy.

"At 18.00 hours on July 22, I issued the order to prepare the troops for combat. Ten hours remained until the attack. Some of the units had still to cover up to 40 km. But all of them reached the activation area in good time, and

assumed battle formation. The enemy met our assault with a methodical shoot. Our men advanced slowly against the withering shelling and machine gun fire.

"An order came from Kachalov for one of the regiments and a battalion of artillery to make a turning manoeuvre and hit the enemy from flank and rear. The regiment assigned for the manoeuvre, led by 1st Battalion commander Major Yemelyanov and Regimental Commissar Frantsev got off to a good start and advanced some 3 to 4 kilometres. But soon the enemy rushed in reserves and the regiment stalled.

"On the following day the flank blow was repeated by Major Korablinov's regiment, but also unsuccessfully. The division's combat potential was shrinking markedly due to heavy personnel losses. But it was essential to continue the advance despite the casualties in view of the situation at Smolensk and in the Yelna area. That, at least, was what Kachalov told me. The enemy surpassed us in strength 4-to-1."

Badly outnumbered, Kachalov showed the utmost determination and presence of mind to proceed with the offensive, though somewhat slower than originally expected, but no less perseveringly, imperilling the flanks of the nazi force advancing in the main sector. The stamina and firmness shown by the divisions of Kachalov's group are corroborated in the day-to-day account of the operation.

By 9 a.m., July 24, the 104th Tank Division had concentrated in the Borisovochka-Kovali area, while its motorised infantry regiment assembled in a forest south-east of Krasnoselye.

The 149th Infantry Division, in the meantime, attained the northern bank of the Belichok and occupied Voroshilovo. Enemy resistance was stiff, but pressure made the nazis roll back in different directions. In the sector of the 568th Infantry Regiment, for example, they retired north-eastward, and in the 479th Regiment's sector northward.

By evening, the Kachalov group had developed the success on its left wing towards Gorelikovo.

On July 25 and 26, overwhelming tenacious enemy resistance, the 104th Tank Division reached the line from Pustosh through Fadeyeva Buda and Tikhonovka to Kalinovka; the 149th Infantry Division came to Chernyavka,

Voroshilovo and Lyndovka, and the 145th to Osinovka, Pashchevo, Sarytnovka and Barsukovskiye.

The divisions continued to advance on July 27 as well. The 104th was ordered to capture a crossing on the Khmara River in the sector between Pogulyayevka and Yegorovka, and the 149th in the sector between Ponizovka and the railway. In the meantime, the 145th held firm in the Osinovka, Stometki and Khmara River area, while the other units helped seize the Khmara crossings.

Patrols spotted enemy reserves being rushed in from the Orsha and Smolensk areas and saw the nazis concentrating mechanised troops in and around Shumayevo, Dokudovo and Ivanino.

The enemy's resistance mounted still more on July 29. Our lines were under heavy artillery and mortar fire. Nazi aircraft continuously bombed and strafed our headquarters, gun emplacements and infantry concentrations. That day the forward units of the 104th were fighting south of Dudarevka and around Marchenovka, coping with heavy enemy anti-tank shelling. The 568th Regiment of the 149th Division reached out into Zimnitsa, the 479th captured Lyndovka, while the 744th pushed its right wing into Nikulino and its left to height 192.1. Nazi infantry, panzers and guns fought back ferociously.

The 340th Infantry Regiment of the 145th Division struck out for Vaskovo in defiance of fierce enemy fire. The 729th was engaged in the Moshek-Zhigalov sector, and the 403rd, straining to capture Mikhailovka, came to height 196.7. The 599th was in the second echelon in and around Shatalovo, Dundukovka and Starinka.

I have obtained the typescript of the memoirs of Major Tatarchevsky, Commander of the 403rd Regiment, from which I learned that Mj.-Gen. Volkhin, the Division commander, had orders to assume defences in the Mikhailovka, Vaskovo, Pogost area with the object of a subsequent offensive north-westward.

The division concentrated its units under cover of night. Time was short, but despite the haste the defence zone was occupied and equipped within the appointed hour. Major Tatarchevsky received orders to advance overnight and dislodge the enemy installed in Mikhailovka village at dawn.

General Volkhin also wanted the 729th Regiment to advance at night and back up the 403rd with an attack on its right simultaneously or a few minutes later. The 599th Regiment would stand by in the second echelon.

The Commander of the 403rd Regiment prepared for the attack with meticulous care. The mission was conveyed to all officers and men long before marching orders were given. 1st Battalion, reinforced by regimental artillery and mortars, was sent ahead. The artillery battalion advanced in its wake, followed by the other battalions and regimental sub units. Flank and rear security was thoroughly planned and organised. The night march proceeded well. The regiment managed to avoid detection by enemy scouts and arrived at its assault line in perfect order. A short artillery and mortar bombardment preceded a whirlwind dawn attack. The nazis were caught unawares. So much so, that none of them had had time to fire. Their losses were sizable.

Accurate gun and mortar shelling made the success secure. 1st Battalion, under commander Major Yemelyanov, and 1st and 2nd rifle companies and 1st Machine-Gun Company distinguished themselves. The other regimental units, too, fought very well.

However, a few hours later the enemy recovered, brought up fresh reserves, called in the Luftwaffe and mounted a counter-attack with gun and panzer support. Badly bled, the 403rd was compelled to retire from the newly gained line to its previous positions. As for the 729th Regiment, its supporting attack was delayed.

From August 1 onwards, the 403rd and other units of the division advanced towards Mikhailovka-Vaskovo. The enemy who had superior numbers and panzer and artillery support, strove to halt the 403rd and finally succeeded, though at the cost of heavy losses in personnel and vehicles.

In the concluding passage of his memoirs, Major Tatarchevsky wrote:

"The daring and bravery of my men in single combat with enemy panzers was magnificent. At that time, stick bombs, anti-tank grenades, incendiary bottles and portable mines was all the infantry had to fight panzers. But panzers blazed like torches when skilfully hit by incendiary

bottles. If a panzer stopped, volunteers risked their lives to clamber atop and cover the vision-slits with their capes. Or else they ran to meet the lumbering vehicles and put anti-tank mines under their tracks."

Tatarchevsky was wounded in the battle here described. Early in the morning of August 1, after an artillery barrage, the enemy pushed out in force at Rudnya-Novaya, Zharkovka, Shypenko, Pechersk, Buryanka, Pecharskaya Buda and Vydritsa towards Roslavl. According to Guderian, the 24th Panzer and 7th and 9th Army Corps were committed to capture the city. At 5 a.m. some 100 panzers, with motorised infantry support, lunged into Zvenchatka on the Roslavl highway.

The Luftwaffe pounded away with added ferocity in Kachalov's sector, particularly in the Roslavl area, which was now defended by the 222nd Infantry Division, also of Kachalov's group.

The following day the situation went from bad to worse. Enemy motorised units reached Noviny, Starinka, Rogozhinskiye, Novy Derebuzh and Pechkurovo. Kachalov's left wing was outflanked by more than a regiment of motorised infantry and a regiment of panzers. But by the end of the day the nazi advance was stemmed. On the right wing, however, isolated squads of enemy motorcyclists and motorised infantry with panzer support managed to penetrate into the Zabolotovka area.

At mid-day on August 2 our 104th Tank Division moved back in face of a numerically superior enemy force, fighting a strenuous action against enemy panzers and motorised infantry at Borisovochka.

Alexander Davidenko, ex-Commissar of the 104th, supplied me with considerable background material about the battle. Here is what he wrote, in part:

"Advancing towards the village of Pochinok, we ran into strong enemy resistance at Stupino and Ivonino villages on July 28. A battle ensued, lasting through July 29, 30 and 31. Each of these days of fighting were extremely costly for us. On July 30 and 31 our 104th alone lost 473 men killed or wounded. Our tank regiment also suffered considerable casualties. Our KV tanks acquitted themselves splendidly. The nazis, it seemed, had no guns big enough to pierce KV armour. This terrified them. The KV were

invulnerable. Pity we had only a few of them. I remember two KV tanks that returned from the battlefield in the evening of July 30. They were intact, although we counted as many as 102 shell dents on one of them.

"On July 30, our reconnaissance reported we were being outflanked to right and left. In the afternoon of the following day the division commander and I decided to withdraw from the pocket before the enemy succeeded sealing it. Good thing we did. In the morning of August 1 our division commander received the Group Commander's official order to break out of the encirclement. The units moved in the specified direction and encountered stiff enemy resistance. A strenuous battle broke out. It lasted until late at night. The nazis mounted several attacks, but our tanks drove them back and claimed a heavy toll. The infantry took no part in the fighting—just the tanks. Our 104th Regiment and two tank battalions co-operated on the Commander's orders with units of the 28th Army. We fought well, but did not manage to break through until we called in the infantry. Somewhere around noon the 28th Army Commander rolled up to our CP in a T-34 tank. He heard our division commander's situation report and issued specific instructions.

"When breaking out of the pocket we lost the commander and commissar of our tank regiment; the regimental chief of staff was seriously wounded. Division Commander Col. Vasily Burkov was wounded in both shoulders later in the day. I dressed his wounds and sent him in an armoured car to division headquarters."

After a thorough study of the situation, General Kachalov stated in an order on August 2 that the enemy was obviously trying to drive in a wedge between the fortified line on the Desna River and the Group's right wing, mounting his offensive with redoubled force on Novy Derebuzh, Pechkurovo and Roslavl from Khislevichi and Krychev. Kachalov ordered his troops to stem the enemy advance from Ivanovka through Osinovka, Yefremovka, Novy Derebuzh and Pechkurovo to Roslavl. The most important thing, Kachalov pointed out, was to retain the line along the Stomet River and the Roslavl area. He planned a counter-blow in the general direction of Yegorovka and

Pochinok, which would bring him into the rear of the nazi forces at Yelna.

Kachalov's order was a realistic one. It described the situation accurately and oriented the troops, dovetailing their action with that of their neighbours, particularly the 13th Army of the Central Front.

In view of the panzer break-through into the Roslavl area and the subsequent build-up there of German infantry, the Central Front Command issued an order on August 3 for the 13th Army to hit the intruders from west and south-west, while Kachalov's group was thrusting from the north. The 13th Army's mission was thus twofold, for it also had to prevent a nazi advance east of Oster River toward Bryansk.

The 13th Army concentrated for the assault in the forest north of Shumyachi (a cavalry division) and in positions at Miloslavichi, Vasilyevka and Gulki (137th and 121st infantry and 21st cavalry divisions).

In the meantime, the 4th Paratroop Corps was to contain units of the nazi 7th Army Corps along a line from Khotimsk through Pervomaiskaya to Mikheyevichi.

The order reached the 13th Army in the evening of August 3, and it tackled its mission the following day.

The enemy, meanwhile, had consolidated his positions and, in effect, accomplished the operational encirclement of Kachalov's group. I have no precise information as to why the Central Front Command was so late with its order to strike at the nazi force enveloping our troops in the Roslavl area. If the attack had been made, say, a day earlier, the situation in the sector would have developed far more favourably and Kachalov's group would have broken out of the ring in full force.

All night long on August 2 the enemy strained to crash through right and left into the rear of Kachalov's group and bottle it up. Essentially, the nazis were successful. General Kachalov regrouped his forces, deploying two infantry regiments for a counter-attack from Stodolishche towards Roslavl with the object of mowing down the opposing nazi force in concert with the 222nd Infantry Division and clear the city of enemy forward units.

But the action took on an increasingly dramatic turn. The Group's Headquarters was threatened with complete

encirclement and annihilation. Kachalov, who was at his CP in a wood near Stodolishche, decided to crash out of the pocket towards Lysovka and Starinka, and ordered the 149th Infantry Division to send a regiment to Lysovka. This regiment was to advance in the first line, break the enemy ring and help the headquarters force out of its predicament.

The regiment was to approach Lysovka at 23.00 hours. The headquarters column would arrive there at the same time. However, the regiment did not arrive at the pre-arranged line until the morning of August 4, by which time Starinka village was seized by the enemy. After readying for combat, the regiment lashed out at the nazi force in the village. The headquarters column closed in as well. A fierce battle developed, lasting with seesaw success until 5 p.m. Headquarters vehicles were concealed in the forest, while the personnel headed by Vasily Kolesnikov, Member of the Military Council, joined the battle lines to encourage the troops. Kachalov boarded an IIQ tank and drove to the front to take personal charge of the fighting.

Commander Zakharov of the 149th Division has kindly supplied me with his account of the battle:

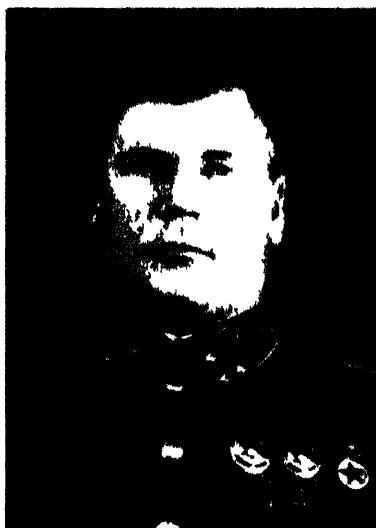
"In the morning of August 1 a numerically superior enemy force supported by aircraft mounted an offensive on our division. We fought back fiercely. On August 3 orders arrived from the Army Commander to break out of the encirclement. The Army was to withdraw in two columns towards Roslavl, the right column consisting of the 145th Infantry Division and the left of the 149th and Army Headquarters. During the night on August 3 the 145th lost its way and blundered on to the route of the left column. This created a jam. Not until the morning of August 4 were we able to unscramble the mess.

"On August 4 the vanguard of Col. Pilinog's head regiment engaged the enemy for possession of Starinka village. The nazis resisted stiffly. Soon, Lt.-Gen. Kachalov, Commander of the 28th Army, and his Member of the Military Council, came to my OP. I told them about the reconnoitred detour possibility north of Starinka. Kachalov summoned Col. Pilinog and ordered him to mount one more attack and capture Starinka. At 13.00 hours the regiment made a fresh assault with the support of two artillery

regiments. But again the enemy stood firm. At 15.00 the Army Commander climbed into his tank and roared off towards Starinka, followed by his aide in an armoured car. I saw the Commander's tank reach the regiment's battle line and disappear in a gully near the village. A few minutes later the aide's vehicle returned and brought orders from Kachalov to load a regiment of infantry into all available vehicles to pursue the enemy, who, the Commander thought, had begun to withdraw. We had a company of ammunition lorries at headquarters. I ordered the men to unload the ammunition, and Col. Pilinog's 3rd Battalion to board the vehicles.

"The regimental commander was instructed to march up his regiment in a column behind the 3rd Battalion. When the automobiles approached Starinka the enemy shelled them severely with guns and mortars, halting their advance. So I decided that after dark I would lead the division along the route suggested by the reconnaissance troop.

"At 10 a.m. on August 5 we began crossing the Oster River in the vicinity of the Moscow-Warsaw highway. My Deputy Commander, Col. Bobrov, went ahead with the forward regiment. The staff and I organised and sent off units across the river. The last of the regiments had crossed over, and only the headquarters battery of the light artillery regiment and the divisional staff still had to go when enemy planes demolished the crossing at 14.00. Division headquarters, minus its operations department, which had gone across with the forward troops, the commander of the artillery regiment and about 40 men of the headquarters battery—together some 100 of us—were stranded on the western bank. It was no use trying to break through, because the enemy had brought up infantry and panzers. So we had no choice but to draw back into the forest, burn our vehicles and set out on foot. On August 28 we managed to cross the enemy line on the Desna River near Chashcha. We reconnoitred the enemy's defence lines for five long days and knew where they had their guns, where their trenches were, and where we could best pass unnoticed. The nazis did not discover us until sentries in the Soviet trenches hailed us, "Who goes?" When we replied, the Germans opened fire, but we had already reached safety.



V. Y. Kachalov

"The men and officers of the 149th displayed the utmost bravery and endurance, for they were splendidly steeled for combat by proper training and political orientation. The division was rightly made a Guard Division"

I think the reader will also be interested to read the following account of the heroic 149th by Vladimir Tereshkin, head of the Political Department of the 28th Army.

"When the Army was breaking out of the nazi ring," Tereshkin relates, "General Zakharov and some 700-800 men and officers covered the Army's crossing of the Oster River. Early in the morning, after the Army's units and equipment were across, the nazis cut off Zakharov's group. I was among those who were trapped. So were General Fomenko and the chief of the Army's medical service. I was always close beside Zakharov and admired him as a courageous and loyal officer.

"The first day of our encirclement was particularly difficult. Our group, crowded into a space of some 3 sq km, was continuously assaulted by the nazis, who had greatly superior numbers and champed at the bit to wipe us out. The enemy mounted attack after attack. Nazi planes swooped down on us en masse. The nazis also tried persuasion, scattering leaflets urging us to surrender and

speaking to us through loudspeakers, and the like. Our men and officers scorned all blandishments and continued their gallant resistance under the skilled leadership of General Zakharov.

"After dark, General Zakharov assembled us (only 400 to 500 survived) and led us in an audacious move into the enemy's rear. We scoured the area for several days, withstanding numerous savage skirmishes with numerically superior enemy units. Later, Zakharov divided the troop into several smaller groups and gave each explicit instructions as to how to break out of the enemy pocket. I reached our main forces with a group of men and officers before Zakharov. A few days later, he arrived with a small force."

It is difficult today to reconstruct the course of Kachalov's actions in detail at that juncture. But by and large I have a clear enough idea of what had happened. The Army Commander followed the ups and downs of the fighting from the CP of the 149th Division. At some point, when the fighting reached a culmination point, the experienced soldier thought an added impulse was essential to turn the tide in our favour. So he rushed into the thick of the battle without the least concern for his own safety, hoping to tilt the balance by his example and the firing from his tank. Besides, he wanted to see the fighting at close range and decide what to do next. When his accurately firing tank appeared on the scene the enemy evidently shrank back. That was when Kachalov told his aide to go back and summon some motorised infantry for the pursuit. In the meantime, the enemy must have grasped the situation and opened up with his artillery. The gallant commander lost his life in the bombardment at the approaches to Starinka village. The crew of his tank were killed too. Later, villagers buried their remains in a common grave.

Kachalov's death is also confirmed by enemy information. The log of the 9th Army Corps captured by our troops, says: "By that time the Commander of the 28th Army, Kachalov, and his staff, were killed. He tried to smash through Starinka village with a tank group, but was ultimately stopped, and failed to pass."

The generals and officers who had known Kachalov in the years of his service in the Red Army, hold his memory in high esteem. I knew him personally, for he was Com-

mander of the 14th Parkhomenko Cavalry Division when I was in command of its 55th Cavalry Regiment. As his subordinate, I always considered him a model divisional commander.

Kachalov was born in Gorodishche village, what is now Volgograd Region, in 1890. His parents had been peasants, and later, shortly before the Revolution, owned a leather goods shop in Tsaritsyn (now Volgograd). They went bankrupt and returned to the village, where they took up farming again. In 1910 Kachalov finished a commercial school in Kharkov and was called up to the army. Demobilised in 1912, he re-enlisted in 1914 and served as ensign with the 712th Infantry Group. In 1918 he volunteered to the Red Army and took part in the Civil War. He was chief of a unit, then a brigade chief of staff, chief of staff of the 1st Cavalry Corps, divisional chief of staff and, after the Civil War was over, division commander and commander of a military district.

Those who knew him in the last war speak very highly of him. He is said to have behaved bravely in battle, showing no signs of uncertainty at any time, and controlling the troops with a firm hand.

I have referred at such length here to General Kachalov and the circumstances of his death because he was groundlessly accused of treason at the time and of going over to the enemy. In December 1953 Kachalov's "case" was reviewed and he was completely exonerated.

After losing Kachalov, the units of the 28th Army (the Kachalov group) were in a dire predicament. Subsequently, what was left of the Group was transferred from the Western Front command to the Reserve Front. Many of its units managed to break out of the encirclement, but were badly bled and depleted.

In the prevailing circumstances, the Kachalov group's offensive towards Smolensk had no chance of yielding territorial success. But it did pin down a considerable enemy force heading for Roslavl. Guderian's panzer force and the supporting units were dealt painful blows and suffered irreparable losses.

Guderian himself says in so many words that Soviet action from the Roslavl area imperilled the plans of the Hitler Command. "No matter what decisions Hitler may

have taken," he writes, "the first thing the 2nd Panzer Group had to do was to eliminate the danger to its right flank. For this reason, I reported to the Army Group Commander that I had decided to advance on Roslavl in order to capture that road junction and have my hands free to seize roads leading eastward, southward and south-westward. I asked him to allocate the strength I needed for this operation. My proposal was approved and the 2nd Panzer Group was given command over the following formations— a) the 7th Army Corps consisting of the 7th, 23rd, 78th and 197th infantry divisions, and the 9th Army Corps consisting of the 263rd, 292nd and 137th infantry divisions for the advance on Roslavl, and b) the 20th Army Corps consisting of the 15th and 268th infantry divisions to replace battle-weary panzer divisions that had to be regrouped in the Yelna Bulge area."*

As we see, the three Soviet divisions that made up Kachalov's group drew off three nazi corps (two army corps and one of the tank corps of Guderian's original group).

Guderian had a thoroughly weighed plan for his counter-strike at Roslavl, according to which the 10th motorised and 7th infantry divisions taken from the 7th Army Corps and attached to the 24th Panzer Corps would afford cover to his right flank from Soviet troops operating from the Klimovich-Miloslavichi area. In co-operation with these two divisions, the 3rd and 4th panzer divisions were to push towards Roslavl and contact the 9th Army Corps, advancing somewhat to the north between the rivers Desna and Oster. At the same time, the 23rd and 197th infantry divisions of the 7th Army Corps were to thrust into Roslavl from Petrovichi and Khislevichi in order to join the 3rd Panzer Division and develop the offensive along the Roslavl-Stodolishche-Smolensk highway. One more division, the 78th, would stand by in reserve.

The 263rd Infantry Division of the nazi 9th Army Corps was assigned to advance from north to south between the highway and the Oster River, striking out with its left flank covered by the 137th Infantry Division deployed from Smolensk, towards the Roslavl-Yekimovich-Moscow highway.

* Guderian, *op. cit.* S. 166.

The 24th Panzer and 7th Army Corps were to begin on August 1, and the 9th Army Corps on August 2.

This is evidence enough that the nazi command had built up tremendous strength in the sector of Kachalov's group. Yet, despite Guderian's personal control, the initial successes of the German force were insignificant. Guderian admits in his memoirs that on August 2 "the achievements of the 9th Army Corps were anything but impressive".*

But let us go back to a somewhat earlier period and to the sector where I happened to be at the time.

It is clear from the aforesaid that the enemy planners were eager to seal the pocket round our troops in the Smolensk area and to the north-west of Smolensk by means of an eastward drive. With this purpose in view, the nazis mounted an assault on July 26 and 27 with the 7th Panzer and 20th Motorised Divisions from north-west of Yartsevo southward towards Solovyovo, the site of a Dnieper crossing of the utmost importance to our 20th and 16th Armies. At the same time, part of the 17th Panzer Division proceeded from the south, a point west of Yelna, to strike in the same direction. The enemy forced the Soviet guard battalion to retire to the other bank, and took possession of the crossing. Major Sakhno, commander of a regiment of the 109th Motorised Infantry Division, commandeered all armed men of the auxiliary units of the 5th Mechanised Corps stationed in the area and the battalion that had retreated from the crossing with its seven tanks and anti-aircraft guns, and organised the defence of the eastern bank of the Dnieper in the proximity of the crossing.

After I visited the sector near the Solovyovo crossing with a group of officers and obtained an idea of the situation, the Front Command instructed General Rokossovsky to mount a counter-attack in the Yartsevo and Solovyovo area with the object of crushing the enemy there and continuing the advance towards Dukhovshchina. All available aircraft in the area were to support Rokossovsky's offensive. The report to IIQ of the Western Sector, said:

"Infuriated by our unyielding resistance, the enemy is feeling about for a vulnerable spot. The latest moves of the

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 170.

Yartsevo group southward are meant to cut the supply lines of our 16th and 20th armies."

Towards evening on July 27 the nazis began to dig in along the western bank of the Dnieper south of Yartsevo. This was the first intimation that they had abandoned their offensive eastward.

The following day Rokossovsky's group mounted its counter-offensive. Savage fighting broke out in the Solovyovo area, in the course of which our avenue of retreat via the crossing was restored.

While part of the Western Front troops were striking back at the enemy's Dukhovshchina-Yartsevo force, the 20th Army and a part of the 16th Army fought on arduously in their semi-encircled positions. The pocket round them closed on July 27 north and west of Smolensk. The Smolensk group under Lt.-Gen. Pavel Kurochkin was pinning down a considerable nazi force. Its badly depleted 12 divisions drew off something like 10 enemy divisions (of which three were panzer and two were motorised divisions) up to July 23. Besides, a force of more than six nazi divisions was deployed on the outer perimeter to protect the force encircling Kurochkin from outside attacks. As the fighting at Dukhovshchina, Yartsevo and Yelna grew fiercer, the enemy command was compelled to reinforce the outer lines bringing its power up to some eight divisions by July 26.*

By drawing off a strong Army Group Centre force, the 20th Army and part of the 16th robbed it of an opportunity to develop its success from the Smolensk area towards Dorogobuzh and Vyazma, and, in the final analysis, helped us establish an unbroken Soviet line east of Smolensk, which held the westward-driving enemy in check for well over two months. The troops of the 20th and 16th armies combined tenacious resistance with counter-attacks, which they mounted at all times of the day and night.

The savage fighting claimed a heavy toll in personnel, especially from enemy air attacks and the withering artillery and mortar fire. Towards the end of July some of the divisions had no more than one or two thousand men. The 20th Army had as few as 65 tanks, 177 field guns and 120

* According to captured German General Staff situation maps for July 23-26, 1941.

anti-tank guns. The air arm consisted of a mere nine undamaged planes. Ammunition and fuel were running low, and food had to be flown in by air. The Command of the Front, by the way, could not afford to assign more than ten TB-3 planes for this purpose from its slender air force. Besides, the freight could not be flown in the daytime due to the enemy's control of the air. For all this, the two armies held firm, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy and rolling slowly eastward.

The break out of the enemy ring was efficiently planned and successful. The divisions were told where they had to strike to reach the crossings and were assigned precise routes of retreat. Switch-lines and coverage were developed, and definite instructions were issued as to points of concentration and defence positions to be assumed after the break-out across the Dnieper and Vop rivers.

The withdrawal and Dnieper crossing began in the night of August 4. The 5th Mechanised Corps did not succeed in crashing through to the Solovyovo crossing and was diverted to Ratchino, where it crossed the Dnieper under fire. The rest of the 20th Army smashed the ring and reached the Dnieper in the Zaborye area along a front of 20 kilometres, where four crossings were held in readiness from 3.00 hours on August 3. By the morning of August 5 the advance units of the 20th Army swept enemy cover detachments out of the way, crossed the river and assumed defences to cover the crossing. Fighting every inch of the way, the main force of the 20th Army retreated to the bank and crossed the river unit by unit, instantly manning defences on the eastern bank. The crossing, which lasted several days, proceeded under heavy nazi shelling and was constantly harried by enemy aircraft.

The 16th Army units were to have crossed the Dnieper on August 5. But developments on the front made me speed things up. On August 2, I issued an order for the Army to cross to the eastern Dnieper bank on August 3.

The Army had begun reconnoitring possible crossing sites as early as July 29, and patrols reported that the other bank of the river in the Army's sector was already occupied by the enemy. This included Sopshino, Malinovka and Dobromin. So we decided to cross the river north of the Army's sector. Ultimately, a point south of Golovino was

picked. The crossing facilities were built by Army engineers and were ready as from 4.00 hours on August 3. Col. Yasinsky, chief of the 16th Army engineers, was appointed commander of the river crossing.

The sick and wounded, of whom there were about 3,000, were taken across first in the early morning of August 3, followed by the infantry, the motor vehicles and supplies. As for the heavy guns and freights, they were taken over the Solovyovo crossing. After the crossing south of Golovino was destroyed by enemy planes at 14.00 hours, the men waded across, for the river was no more than 70 to 80 centimetres deep, followed by nearly all the guns of the 129th Infantry Division and part of the 152nd Division. However, the 16th Army crossing was demolished a second time, and the rest of the property, including 50 guns, artillery units of the 152nd Infantry Division and the 34th Infantry Corps had to be brought across at Solovyovo.

The crossing at Golovino proceeded under enemy artillery and mortar fire from the eastern bank of the Dnieper and continuous bombing and strafing from the air. The losses in motor vehicles and other property were tremendous, but the armed personnel, the artillery and other weapons that had survived the Smolensk battles were brought across the Dnieper almost entirely intact.

By mid-day August 4 the crossing of troops and property was almost completed, although a few artillery men were still dragging guns across the Dnieper. By the end of the day the Army concentrated in and around Kucherovo, Bereznaya, Seltso, Mileyevo and Samoilovo (all of which were some 8 to 18 kilometres east of the Dnieper).

A security force was sent by the 46th Infantry Division on my orders to the Golovino crossing and south of it along the Dnieper bank to cover the army build-up.

On August 5 the 46th and 129th divisions dealt all day long with small enemy groups in their own sectors (Kucherovo and Seltso). On the night of August 5-6 the 152nd Division and 34th Infantry Corps began deployment to new points of concentration, followed by the 46th and 129th divisions on the following night.

This was the final phase of the Smolensk Battle, which lasted until September 10, when the enemy build-up at Yelna was finally smashed. The Soviet troops acquitted

themselves splendidly, showing the utmost devotion and bravery. True, we did not succeed at the time in recapturing Smolensk and restoring the front along the Dnieper. But the losses we inflicted on the enemy were so heavy that the nazi command had to scrap its original offensive plans. The gain in time enabled the Soviet Supreme Command to deploy a new operational echelon east of Dukhovshchina, Smolensk and Yelna, frustrating for some time the enemy's plans of a further advance.

Some people think that abandoning a battlefield to the enemy is tantamount to an outright defeat. This is not always the case. Take the Smolensk Battle. The enemy expected to enter Moscow on August 7, 1941. But the heavy fighting in and east of Smolensk exhausted and disorganised the crack divisions of Army Group Centre. Heavy losses robbed the enemy of his offensive potential. To proceed with the advance on Moscow, the Hitler Command had had to bring up reserves and re-equip the badly mauled panzer and mechanised divisions. In the meantime, we were able to rush in fresh forces.

It was at the Dnieper crossings that I met General Lukin for the last time in the war. He was soon appointed Commander of the 19th Army. That Army, bled white in previous battles, was torn to rags and surrounded in the Vyazma area. Lukin, wounded several times in the Sychov forest, was taken prisoner when unconscious. His leg was amputated by nazi doctors before he regained consciousness. Subsequently, the nazis took him from one POW hospital to another, treating his wounds in the hope they could prevail on him to betray his country. In 1945 he was freed. After further medical treatment and a long vacation, Lt.-Gen. Lukin joined the War Science Department, and later retired. He is now an active member of the Soviet War Veterans Committee.

On July 30 the nazi command admitted that the "original plan of reaching Lake Onega and the Volga River by October 1 is no longer practicable". However, it had not yet lost hope of "the troops reaching the Leningrad-Moscow line and seizing areas south of Moscow by that time".*

Guderian attests that the OKH and the Chief of the

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 167.

General Staff "had a thankless task", because all operations were guided from top level and there was no final decision yet concerning further operations by July 31.*

In early August the enemy was compelled to abandon the offensive towards Moscow and assume defences along the Yartsevo-Solovyovo-Yelna line. The only place where fighting continued unabated was the Yelna area, where our 24th Army kept counter-attacking the 10th Panzer Division with fierce determination. We considered the Yelna region a convenient jumping-board for a nazi assault on Moscow, and were determined to neutralise it.

The enemy plan of advancing on Moscow was foiled by the Smolensk Battle. We owe this to the tenacious and gallant resistance of our Smolensk forces and to the series of counter-blows struck by the Reserve Front, rushed into the battle at the most critical stage.

In face of an imminent fresh enemy assault towards Moscow, the Supreme Command deployed reserve troops to the sectors most likely to come under attack.

The front in the main operational sector (Smolensk, Yartsevo, Vyazma) was stabilised in early August along the Vop and Dnieper rivers. Troops of the 28th Army (the Kachalov group) were transferred to the Reserve Front, and the left edge of the Western Front thus shifted farther north. The enemy exhausted his offensive drive on reaching the Vop and Dnieper rivers. Mauled in the battles against the 20th and 16th Armies, he dug in and assumed the defensive.

We learned of the tremendous losses suffered by the German forces from numerous documents that fell into our hands. According to the nazi General Staff casualties in the fighting in and around Smolensk aggregated to a quarter million men.

"Matters came to a point," wrote the Commander of 3rd Battalion, 53rd Motorised Infantry Regiment, in his situation report pleading for help and reinforcements, "that our Lieutenant had to appoint a non-commissioned officer to command a platoon. [This, in the German army, is an unheard-of thing.—*A.E.*] In the last few days our battalion lost 5 officers, 15 non-coms and 106 privates. Combat efficiency is dropping fast. We need men and officers. Our

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S 167.

repairmen have no spares. Many of our vehicles are out of action, either from hits or from lack of spares. We have to replace cylinders. The shortage of fuel is acute. The men's clothes are worn thin."

The commander did not get a reply to his sitrep soon enough, it seems, because he dispatched a still more alarming report a few days later. "The situation has grown extremely tense in the last four days," said his second appeal. "We need reinforcements. Here are the casualties in the four days: officers killed 3, wounded 1; non coms killed 3, seriously wounded 2, missing 1. Privates killed 33, wounded 56, seriously wounded 19, sick 18, missing 11. Reinforcements: officers 0, non coms 0, privates 0. Due to the heavy losses of the last few days the battalion is unable to act efficiently. Battleworthiness is tragic. Personal control by the officers is in a precarious state. Tension has reached a point where the battalion can be made to attack only by coercion, that is, force of arms."*

These two sitreps, captured by us and available in our archives produce a stark picture of the state the Nazi troops must have been in after the sustained counterblows effected by the Soviet force in the 30 days of heavy fighting in the Smolensk and Nevel sectors. Hundreds of thousands of killed and wounded, hundreds of charred and battered vehicles, a palpable and painful depletion in guns, firearms and, particularly, mortars, which were put out of action in terms of whole batteries—this was the toll the Nazis had had to pay for their reckless drive on Smolensk. Besides, they lost General Ritter von Weber, Commander of the 17th Panzer Division and one of the more eminent German panzer generals.**

The officers and staffs were nervous and apprehensive. The orders of the German command, too, changed in tenor. Such terms as "sudden" and "whirlwind" were used in them less frequently. They referred more often to losses sustained in the fighting and appealed for judicious use of matériel, saving fuel and ammunition. Commanders were warned they should not expect to get new tanks and vehicles, and personnel reinforcements.

* From captured files

** See Guderian, *op. cit.*

“Russians counter-attack and defend their positions tenaciously and bravely. Often, they prefer to die on the spot where the commander’s order put them. If the whole first wave is annihilated, the second and third waves of Russians continue to advance.” This is a typical sample of what the enemy wrote about our soldiers in his reports.

Hundreds of men who fought in the Smolensk and Nevel sectors were decorated by the Soviet Government for meritorious service and bravery. Seven were conferred the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and 928 were decorated with Orders and medals.

Enemy orders and reports intercepted by us frequently complained of damage inflicted by partisans. Wherever they turned, the nazis were confronted by bitter hatred. They were scared of pitching camps in forests, away from the roads, and their stoppages in villages and towns were filled with alarm. Danger lurked for them at every step. A partisan’s bullet was liable to mow them down any minute.

The losses we inflicted on the enemy had a telling effect. Besides, we won priceless time by our July and August battles. This gave us an opportunity to evacuate mills and factories and other enterprises from war-threatened areas. Also, we managed to mobilise large reserve forces for the fighting to come. Fortifications were erected in the interim at distant and close approaches to Moscow.

Our determined stand in the Smolensk area foiled enemy intentions to support the Army Group North offensive on Leningrad with thrusts at Ostashkov and Bologoye with part of the Army Group Centre force. This was a tangible comfort for the defenders of Leningrad. What was more, the stiff Soviet resistance at Smolensk and the losses it entailed compelled the enemy to remove units of the 4th Panzer Group from the Leningrad sector and reinforce the armies advancing on Moscow.

The summer battles of 1941 gave war experience to the soldiers, commanders, political officers and generals of the Red Army, who gained knowledge of enemy tactics, above all the tactics of nazi panzer and motorised units, the enemy’s system of fire in attack and defence, and learned to destroy enemy panzers and planes

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NEW FRONT

In the beginning of August, I was at the Solovyovo crossing in the upper reaches of the Dnieper. The defences there against continuously mounting enemy pressure had to be strengthened. Anti-aircraft facilities were absolutely essential to protect the crossing from Luftwaffe raids. Land coverage, too, had to be organised. The other thing was to improve the crossing itself. The enemy was straining every sinew to prevent our troops from reaching the other bank. All our crossings were continuously harassed by ground attacks and ceaselessly bombed and strafed from the air. Yet we needed the crossings to function normally, because the 20th and 16th armies had still to get across the river. A determined counter-attack flung back the enemy, who had come hard up to Solovyovo.

When communications with the units had been restored and the crossing began at last to function well, I was called back to Front Headquarters, then situated in Kasnya, 20 kilometres north of Vyazma. Marshal Timoshenko told me when I arrived that I was being summoned to Supreme Headquarters to receive a new appointment and that I would not come back to the Western Front again.

Though pulled out of the savage battle, I could not shake off the thoughts and emotions that had gripped me all these days, focussed on the one desire of stemming the nazi avalanche and achieving a shift, if only a small one, in the fortunes of war. Frankly, I was somewhat upset by the summons to Supreme Headquarters, which made me abandon a war theatre where I had more or less gained my bearings. Besides, I could not quite overpower the hidden sense of alarm as to how Stalin appraised my record

of the past weeks. I knew of many top military leaders who were dealt with severely on charges I could scarcely believe.

Deeply immersed in my thoughts, I did not notice our reaching Moscow. The blacked-out capital was as dark as the forests around it. It was the roar of planes, the thunder of exploding bombs and the barking of AA guns that drew me out of my thoughts. The enemy air-raid on the capital was petering out.

At Headquarters I was received by Stalin in the presence of other members of the State Defence Committee and the Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov.

Two of us had been summoned: Col.-Gen. Fyodor Kuznetsov, ex-Commander of the North-Western Front, and myself.

After the introductions, Marshal Shaposhnikov made a brief though exhaustive situation report. In the near future, he said, enemy thrusts were expected in the southern sector on the Crimea and in the central sector from Mogilev and Gomel on Bryansk and, subsequently, on Orel and Moscow.

After Shaposhnikov's report, Stalin showed Kuznetsov and me the main enemy offensives on his map. He repeated some of the things said by Shaposhnikov and stressed that the enemy advance in the Bryansk sector and the Crimea had to be blocked at all costs. This, he said, was the reason why the Bryansk Front and a Separate Army in the Crimea, with Front powers, were being set up.

Stalin concluded with a question I had not expected.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked me. "The Bryansk Front or the Crimea?"

I said I was ready to go where the Supreme Command thought best to send me. Stalin looked at me closely, and I saw a hint of displeasure in his face. What he wanted was a more explicit answer. He asked curtly:

"Speak up, and be more explicit."

"I should like to go where the situation is graver," I said hastily.

"It is equally grave and difficult in the Crimea and at Bryansk," he replied.

I was straining to break the peculiar deadlock.

"Send me where the enemy will use motorised troops. That's where I think I'll be more useful, since I have commanded mechanised troops and know their tactics."

"Fine," Stalin said. Instantly, he turned to Kuznetsov and asked him the same question.

"I'm a soldier," Kuznetsov replied. "I'll fight wherever I'm sent."

"You may be a soldier," Stalin said, stretching his words somewhat, "but surely you have an opinion of your own?"

Kuznetsov said again:

"I'm a soldier, and I'm always ready to serve and work wherever I am sent."

Stalin looked at me, and announced:

"Comrade Eremenko, you are appointed Commander of the Bryansk Front. Leave tomorrow and waste no time in organising the front. Guderian's panzer group is operating in the area, and hard battles are in the offing. So your wish will come true. You'll have to deal with the mechanised troops of your 'old friend' Guderian, whose habits you ought to know from previous encounters on the Western Front."

In conclusion, Stalin ordered me to see the Head of the Red Army Central Political Department and help him pick a suitable Member for the Front's Military Council.

Fyodor Kuznetsov was told he would be Commander of the Separate Seaboard Army.

The written orders were drawn up on the spot.

In parting, Stalin approached me, and said:

"We are assigning an extremely responsible task to the Bryansk Front. Your main purpose is to cover the Moscow strategic area from the south-west and prevent a breakthrough of the Bryansk Front by Guderian's panzer group toward Moscow."

Stalin paused, looked at me intently, obviously awaiting a reply. I spoke unhurriedly and distinctly:

"The assignment is clear. I'll do my best."

The new Front had to be built up in highly unfavourable circumstances, in the course of heavy fighting against a numerous and well-equipped enemy. Our main aim was to build up the troops and staffs as quickly as possible, to erect defence lines as best we could and to organise logistics.

The Bryansk Front, we knew, would soon have to parry strong thrusts by nazi panzer and motorised forces, to stem an enemy force that greatly surpassed us in numbers and tanks, to tire it out and finally mount a counter-blow.

Before recounting how the new Front was organised I should like to outline the extremely complicated and conflicting situation in the zone of its future operations. The first telling counter-blows delivered by our forces had made the enemy embark on an agonising search for new solutions. Hitler decided on his new approach at the very time our Bryansk Front was being forged, and regrettably, the Soviet Command had not guessed his intentions early enough. This had a marked effect on the further course of events.

According to Guderian, Hitler held council with top Wehrmacht generals at the headquarters of Army Group Centre in Borisov on August 4. The generals were of one mind, declaring that the offensive on Moscow had to be continued. Guderian was one of the most zealous proponents of this course of action.

Hitler was not so sure. He was eager to lay a hold on the riches of the Ukraine and to occupy the Crimea, which he thought a natural Red Army air base against Germany's use of Rumanian oil. Yet he was also enticed by the idea of strutting at once into the Soviet capital.

No final decision was really reached at the August 4 conference. This gave the nazi generals, who dreaded a prolonged war and thought capture of the Soviet capital would automatically mean final victory, an opportunity to go ahead in top gear with preparations for a thrust on Moscow from the Bryansk Front sector.

"After the conference," Guderian wrote, "I decided to begin preparing for an offensive on Moscow." He added: "I instructed my staff to plan the Moscow offensive, with the panzer corps driving forward on the right flank, along the Moscow highway and the infantry corps advancing in the centre and on the left flank.

"I intended to deliver the main blow with my right flank, smash through the Russian front, which was fairly weak at the time in the given sector, and advance along the Moscow highway towards Spas-Demensk and Vyazma, thus facilitating the advance of Hoth's group. Later, I intended

to develop the offensive on Moscow. Carried away by my plan, I refused the demand of the OKH, which I received on August 6, to send panzer divisions against Rogachov on the Dnieper far behind my line of the front.”*

“So far,” wrote Guderian in reference to August 11, “all my measures were based on the idea that the command of the Army Group and the OKH considered operations towards Moscow decisive. Despite the conference of August 4 at Borisov, I still hoped that Hitler would finally agree with this plan, which I thought was the most sensible and self-evident.”**

It was not until the third week of August that the nazi generals gave up their efforts to prevail on Hitler to continue the advance on Moscow. In the meantime, they proceeded with their preparations for it and, among other things, built up the right flank of their force in the Bryansk area.

On August 18 the OKH made a last insistent attempt to persuade Hitler in favour of an undelayed thrust against Moscow. But it failed. On August 21 Hitler issued the following order:

“The OKH’s proposal of August 18 is at variance with my own plans.

“I herewith order:

“1. Capturing the Crimea and the industrial and coal area of the Donets Basin; blocking access to Russians to Caucasian oil shall be considered the most important objective before winter sets in, and not the capture of Moscow. The most important objective in the north shall be blockading Leningrad and making contact with the Finns.

“2 The extremely favourable operational situation we have achieved by reaching the Gomel-Pochep line shall be exploited to the full: an operation shall be mounted forthwith by the adjoining flanks of Army Groups South and Centre. The objective shall be not simply for our 6th Army to push the Russian 5th Army beyond the Dnieper, but to destroy the enemy to the last man before he reaches the Desna-Konotop-Sula line. This will enable Army Group South to capture staging areas on the eastern bank of the

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 173.

** *Ibid.*, S. 176.

Dnieper in the middle reaches of the river, and to develop an offensive on Rostov and Kharkov with its left flank in co-operation with Army Group Centre.

"3. Irrespective of subsequent plans, Army Group Centre shall commit as much strength as necessary for the above operation and annihilate the Russian 5th Army, keeping just the moderate strength necessary to repulse enemy attacks in the central sector of the front.

"4. The Crimean peninsula shall be captured, for this is of cardinal importance to our shipping petroleum from Rumania without interference."*-

Acting on this order, the Commander of Army Group Centre issued his own order on August 24, 1941, in which he outlined the task set by Hitler and finalised a plan of action. The document is important to us, because it reveals what strength the nazi command employed to strike south and what strength it left along the former lines to repulse our attacks, particularly in the Bryansk Front sector.

Enemy papers show that the Army Group Centre Command put its own construction on Hitler's order of keeping a moderate force for this purpose. Actually it dispositioned the 4th Field Army almost in full strength and the 47th Panzer Corps of Guderian's group in the sector previously held by the 2nd Panzer Group and the 2nd Field Army. The "moderate" nazi force continued active operations in the Bryansk Front area, while Guderian and his infantry support moved south.

The new move did not create any breach in the nazi line after part of Army Group Centre veered south. It is not true that the Bryansk Front dealt with the flank and rear of enemy troops that had changed the route of their advance, as some historians contend. It faced troops assigned specifically to counteract Soviet efforts in the Bryansk area.

Captured papers reveal that the enemy force in the Bryansk Front area was not really weakened. To be sure, at the time Guderian's forces were in the act of turning they were still operative there, adding to the strength of troops opposing the Bryansk Front.

The Bryansk Front troops had to contend with the enemy in a sector where he had massed his greatest strength.

* Guderian, op. cit., S. 183-84.

Unfortunately, we did not possess conclusive enough information of the enemy's strength and intentions until much later.

Divisional Commissar Pyotr Mazepov, who was Member of the Bryansk Front Military Council, and I arrived in Bryansk on August 16 and set up our CP 14 kilometres south-east of the city in a wooded area. The key departments of our headquarters were housed in a derelict one-storey building. The Political Department was quartered in a smaller building, while all the other services were put up in tents and dug-outs. Mj.-Gen. Georgy Zakharov was appointed Chief of Staff, Divisional Commissar Afanasy Pigurnov was made head of the Political Department, Mj.-Gen. Arkady Yermakov was made my Deputy and Air Mj.-Gen. Fyodor Polynin was placed in charge of our air arm. We staffed our IIQ with officers from the staffs of the 20th Infantry and 25th Mechanised Corps, which had no troops at the time.

Originally, the order for the establishment of the Bryansk Front put just two armies, the 50th and 13th, under its command. The 50th, commanded by Mj.-Gen. Mikhail Petrov, consisted of two corps totalling eight infantry (the 217th, 279th, 258th, 260th, 290th, 278th, 269th and 280th) and one cavalry division, the 55th. Brigade Commissar N. A. Shlyapin was the Army's Member of the Military Council and Col. Lembit Pern was its Chief of Staff.

The 13th Army consisted of eight infantry divisions (the 137th, 121st, 143rd, 132nd, 6th, 155th, 307th and 285th), two cavalry divisions (21st and 52nd) and the 50th Tank Division. This was so on paper, for the divisions were critically undermanned and short of equipment. The reader will recall from the account of the Mogilev Battle (Ch. 4), how hard the Army had had to fight and what adversities it had had to withstand.

Its Commander at the time was Mj.-Gen. Konstantin Golubev. Brigade Commissar Porphiry Furtenko was its Member of the Military Council and Col. Alexander Petrushevsky was Chief of Staff.

The air arm consisted virtually of the 11th Combined Air Division, which we took over from the retreating troops of the Central Front. It had planes and battle-hardened personnel, while the other air units had nothing but their

insignia. More than a hundred pilots were assembled at Bryansk airfield with no aircraft to fly. It was not until late August that air units began flying in from the rear. Most of their flyers had been retrained to handle new planes, the Pe-2 and Yak-1. The other planes we had were antiquated I-15, I-16, R-5 and SB planes, which the aviation industry had stopped producing a long time before. Equipment dribbled in slowly. Some of the idling flyers went to the plane works themselves and flew back two or three planes, and sometimes only one, just off the production line. We had two or three pilots to every serviceable aircraft. One pilot waited in the field with his parachute on while another flew a mission. There was deep disappointment all round if a plane returned damaged or, worse still, failed to return at all.

The serviceable planes made anything up to ten sorties daily. For this reason, most of the planes were continuously needing repair. Of the 20th Fighter Regiment's 15 planes some seven or eight were usually out of order. The same was true of the other air units. The ground crews concentrated chiefly on repairing damaged planes. They worked nights, so the planes would be ready for daylight missions. Mechanics and repairmen hunted for plane wrecks, which their resourceful hands returned to life.

The Bryansk Front sector had a front of 230 kilometres. It had troops of the Reserve Front on its left, and of the Central Front on its right. The terrain was mainly forest and marshland, and there were numerous rivers.

The enemy force that was to assault our sector was as yet unidentified by August 16. We assumed that the enemy would try to follow up the capture of Roslavl with a drive on Bryansk and therefore thrust into the sector held by the 50th Army. However, our assumption did not materialise. The 24th Panzer Corps turned south and lunged at Unecha. The 13th Army front, in the meantime, was faced by the Nazi 258th and part of the 34th infantry divisions and the 3rd, 4th and part of the 17th panzer divisions. They were kept in check until August 9, when the Nazis succeeded in crushing the right flank of the 13th Army.

On the day Mazepov and I arrived, we called a conference of corps staff officers, who formed the nucleus of Front Headquarters. Apart from the immediate tasks

facing the troops of the Bryansk Front, we discussed ways and means of enhancing combat efficiency and organising effective combat training.

From the beginning, the new Front had to cope with a highly active enemy. On August 17 panzers and motorised infantry crashed through the 13th Army front, cut the Bryansk-Gomel railway and captured Unecha. The 13th Army was in a tight spot, but fought on bravely and inflicted heavy losses on the nazis.

From August 18 the nazi troops followed up their earlier success toward Starodub, Novgorod Seversky and, eastward, toward Pochep. The dry weather and good roads favoured swift panzer actions. On August 18 enemy panzers captured Starodub and a massive attack by panzers and motorised infantry carried them into Pochep on August 21. The strong panzer thrusts were intended to crash our defences in stride, with large motorised forces pouring into the breach for a quick advance.

While the fighting raged, we continued assiduously to organise Front Headquarters, bring up reserves, and form a headquarters for the 50th Army. Commanders and political officers kept arriving from Moscow to join Front and other headquarters.

A combat order was issued on August 19 to rub out the enemy force that had broken through to Unecha and cut the Bryansk-Gomel railway.

The operation was to be carried out by the 13th Army and the 55th Cavalry Division of the 50th Army. We planned for them to strike towards Mglin-Unecha-Klinsky.

The other divisions of the 50th Army were instructed to carry on with concentration, and to defend the Zhukovka-Pochep line.

The 13th Army and 55th Cavalry Division had orders to consolidate their positions at Sheludka, Peschaniki Station, Klinsky and Ushcherpye, and to hold firm.

Our air arm, which had 159 planes, was to co-operate with the 50th and 13th armies in the Unecha area. An air strike at enemy columns in the Mglin, Unecha and Starodub area was set for 13.40 hours on August 19, on the assumption that our units off Mglin and Unecha would advance from the west.

All commanders and staffs were instructed to reconnoitre enemy strength and location.

We fell somewhat short of our objective. The 13th Army Headquarters was not always able to maintain reliable communications with the units and control proceedings.

General Golubev had to be relieved of his command. The 13th Army was in retreat and the sorry circumstances compelled us to engage the 55th Cavalry Division in a raid on the enemy rear with the object of retarding the nazi advance, disorganising control and supply. But the mounted troops showed a lack of initiative and determination. Control and leadership were below par.

After a week behind the enemy lines, the division rejoined the main force, its objective unfulfilled. I took the cavalry's failure very close to heart. It angered me that the Commander of the 55th Cavalry Division had been so hesitant and unresourceful. His division was fresh and the men were craving for action. So we relieved Kalmykov of his command for inaction and failure to fulfil orders and packed him off to Moscow, hoping it would make the people there who selected top commanders do their job more thoroughly in future.

On August 19 enemy panzers and motorised infantry continued to build up strength in the general direction of Mglin-Unecha-Starodub. Besides, the 47th Panzer Corps followed obliquely behind the 24th Panzer Corps towards Pochep and Pogar. By the evening of August 20 the nazi reached Pcklin-Starodub-Pochep and the capture of the Mglin, Unecha. Starodub area created a danger of total encirclement for the 13th Army in the region of Vysokoye, Starodub, Unecha. Furthermore, the nazi mounted an attack on Pochep. In the circumstances, we were forced to deploy the newly arrived troops of the 307th and 282nd infantry divisions along the Desna River to cover concentration of arriving forces for the 3rd Army, which was then in the formative stage.

Within 5 or 6 days we expected to mount a general offensive, striking the main blow from Zhukovka-Pochep towards Surazh-Gomel with a force of 10 infantry, two cavalry and two tank divisions, and the auxiliary blow towards Starodub with a force of five or six divisions.

But this offensive operation, as I duly reported to General

Headquarters, would not have the expected success unless there was close co-operation with the Reserve Front, which, I suggested, should launch its operation a day or two before the Bryansk Front with the support of all aircraft at the disposal of the two fronts. Subsequently, the aircraft would be shifted to assist the Bryansk Front.

My proposal to GHQ was based on the idea of massive air support. We still possessed very few planes at the time, not having recovered from the near disastrous loss of planes in the first days of the war. To make matters worse, the modest number of planes we had was badly dispersed. Yet it was clear by then that nothing but massive use of planes against personnel, airfields and other objectives and targets would yield effective results. We took account not only of the material losses of the enemy, though this was the principal factor, but also of the effect it would have on enemy morale in the battlefield.

These were the reasons I put down in my written request. Chief of the General Staff Boris Shaposhnikov replied very tactfully that he did not see eye to eye with me and would not back up my plea. Possibly he thought action by the air arm of one Front in the sector of another would entail rebasing the planes, which would take time and complicate control and logistics. No rebasing was necessary, however, because the airfields of the Reserve and Bryansk Fronts were able to ensure air action in either direction. Some questions of control, it is true, would have to be thrashed out.

The bitter experience of the early fighting convinced us that the air arm, being the most mobile and manoeuvrable, could strike more rapidly and effectively en masse from different directions. We knew from experience that lasting success in a counter-offensive depended on massive air support of the infantry.

I was in no mood, therefore, to submit to Shaposhnikov's opinion. Once more I appealed, this time to the Supreme Command, for massive use of planes against Guderian's troops, and received a hopeful reply. In due course, the promise given to me was kept.

On August 21 the enemy stepped up his actions. Units of the 47th Panzer Corps (the 18th and 17th panzer and 29th mechanised divisions) concentrated in the Zhukovka-

Pochep sector. In the meantime, a strong panzer force and two regiments of motorised infantry of the 24th Panzer Corps mounted an attack on Pochep and captured it by evening. The situation on the right flank of our Front grew more menacing.

On August 23 the 50th Army was ordered to cling to its line west of Bryansk at all costs, while the 13th Army was to hold firm along a line running from Pochep along the eastern bank of the Sudost through Pogor, Borshchevo to Luzhki. It was also to recapture Starodub and to station at least a reinforced infantry regiment there.

Hard-fought battles ensued in the vicinity of Pogor and Starodub. An enemy forward detachment was knocked out of Pochep and driven beyond Krasny Rog and Pyany Rog. Nazi losses were heavy. All the same the 13th Army failed in its mission of seizing Starodub and Unecha. The nazis had built up their strength there and held good positions along the Sudost River.

Our airmen did very well. When raiding a nazi column, one of our SB planes was hit by enemy flak and the pilot steered his blazing aircraft into a cluster of enemy armoured vehicles. The flyer, Sergeant Skovorodin, observer Lt. Vetluzhsky and gunner Jn. Sgt. Cherkashin, lost their lives and were posthumously conferred the title of Heroes of the Soviet Union.

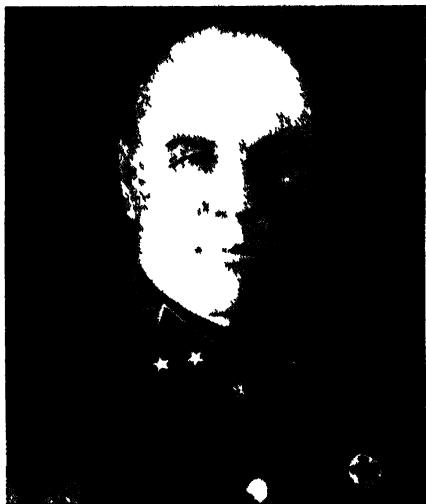
German prisoners taken on August 23 indicated that the 3rd Panzer Division holding Starodub would follow up its advance southward. According to their depositions, the 4th Panzer Division would proceed in the same direction somewhat right of the 3rd.

What the prisoners said was confirmed by air reconnaissance. Scouts had spotted a nazi motorised column (of more than 500 vehicles) advancing southward along the Unecha-Starodub highway. An exhaustive report to this effect was made the following day to the Supreme Commander by telephone.

In the meantime, while moving southward, the enemy operated actively in the Pochep area. A strong panzer thrust made the left flank units of the 260th Infantry Division give way. At least 100 panzers and motorised infantry attacked it.

I was inclined to think on the strength of this information

A M Gorodnyansky



that strong enemy forward units supported by a powerful panzer group were reconnoitring in force with the object of stabbing at Bryansk in the nearest future. But the nazis did not make the expected thrust. We assumed at the time that they had learned about the three defence echelons we had built up at the approaches to the city, reinforced with anti-tank obstacles and ditches. In fact, as we later learned, the 47th Panzer Corps which we expected to strike out at Bryansk, was really assigned to cover the 24th Panzer Corps, which was swarming southward on Hitler's orders. The 47th lunged at Trubchevsk, thus covering up a blow on Novgorod Seversky by the 24th. It was not until considerably later that we learned this was meant to cover a much deeper thrust to the south.

Our Supreme Headquarters did not perceive the enemy's strategic manoeuvre. We were told Guderian's main forces were poised to strike at the right (northern) wing of the Bryansk Front, that is, in the sector of the 217th and 279th infantry divisions of the 50th Army. In a conversation with me on August 24, the day the enemy command started its move south, Shaposhnikov warned that the enemy drive against our right wing would come the next

day, or the day after, and insisted that we take urgent measures to reinforce that sector.

The patchy information obtained by our reconnaissance troop about the move of some enemy units southward was not, in effect, correctly interpreted by either our own Front Command or the Supreme Headquarters, which were informed of it in good time. None of us suspected that it implied a turn southward by the 2nd Field Army and 2nd Panzer Group.

We were told the Bryansk Front would get a reinforcement of Po-2, TB-3 and Pe-2 aircraft and two brigades and two battalions of tanks. This was encouraging news.

The main point of discussion among us then was the dissolution of the Central Front. Supreme Headquarters announced that in view of the dissolution, troops of the 21st and 3rd Armies would come under the Headquarters of the 21st Army. Lt.-Gen. Vasily Kuznetsov was appointed its Commander. The Army was to be shifted to the Bryansk Front, and Supreme Headquarters promised a reinforcement for it of 27,000 men. Mj.-Gen. Yefremov, previously Commander of the Central Front, was appointed my deputy.

We accepted this Supreme Headquarters scheme, though we knew control would be difficult due to the remoteness of 21st Army dispositions. We also requested that 3rd Army HQ, which had no troops under it, should be transferred to the Bryansk Front for a new army command then being formed. We put this new army command in a sector between the 50th and 13th, where it assumed control of two flank divisions from each of them. Also, we asked Supreme Headquarters to speed the appointment of Mj.-Gen. Avksenty Gorodnyansky (Commander of the 129th Infantry Division of the Western Front) as Commander of the 13th Army, and Mj.-Gen. Yakov Kreizer (Commander of the 1st Moscow Motorised Infantry Division) as Commander of the 3rd Army. We indicated in our request that both generals had acquitted themselves as resourceful and staunch leaders in the battles fought by the Western Front. Supreme Headquarters gratified our request.

In conclusion, I extolled the Il-2 attack planes recently sent us, which had at once proved their worth in combat. We assured Supreme Headquarters the Bryansk Front



Y. G Kreizer

would do its best to inflict a crushing defeat on Guderian's troops.

As we see, Supreme Headquarters did not know the situation and undertook to dissolve the Central Front, situated in the very sector to which the enemy was shifting his main effort. Later developments showed the dissolution had been premature. The Central Front should have been reinforced, rather than dissolved. We, too, knew nothing of the change in enemy plans, and acquiesced. If the enemy would really go ahead with his drive on Moscow from Bryansk, the 21st Army was assigned to cover the flank, with possible thrusts into the enemy's flank, and even rear, during his turn northward from Bryansk, provided it got the promised reinforcements.

Our Front was in great difficulties all through its fortnight's existence (the directive for its establishment was signed on August 14). The dissolved Central Front had begun a retreat under strong nazi attacks in the Mogilev-Gomel and Roslavl sectors on August 8. Its 21st and 3rd Armies were in peril of envelopment and total annihilation by the 2nd Field Army and 2nd Panzer Group. Its withdrawal enabled the enemy to reach the far rear of the

South-Western Front. A big gap appeared between the Reserve and Central Fronts.

Our Supreme Command assumed at this point that the nazis were trying to outflank the troops of the Western and Reserve Fronts from the south through Bryansk, and promptly set up the Bryansk Front to cover the Moscow strategic area. The assumption was justified. This had indeed been the original German plan, that of the OKH, to say nothing of Guderian.

On July 24, 1941, a month before Hitler scrapped this plan and issued orders to turn south, Fedor von Bock, Commander of Army Group Centre, reported to Oberkommando with an eye on earlier instructions that "the troops advancing in the south-easterly direction on Bryansk and the 46th and 47th Corps must be replaced and backed away from the front before they can turn in the southerly direction".

The main forces of the Guderian group were then operating along a line from Bykhov to Smolensk and a move on Bryansk would be for them a turn south. It is clear from what Bock said that the nazi command was still thinking of a thrust at Bryansk in late July.

In substance, the enemy was already advancing southward and on August 16, the day we came to Bryansk, he had reached the Starodub area, while the 2nd Field Army was approaching Gomel. To make matters worse, the South-Western Front had insufficient strength to repulse an enemy attack from the north, because all its reserves were used up in repelling the nazis at its point of junction with the Southern Front on the Dnieper.

Supreme Headquarters was informed of this in good time, but took what amounted to a half-measure by ordering the activation of a new army, the 40th, from parts of the 37th and 26th (which was done on August 25) and its deployment along the Desna north of Konotop. In the hope that this new army would stem the enemy advance southward, Supreme Headquarters decided to employ the Bryansk and Reserve Fronts in smashing Army Group Centre forces in their respective sectors. We were no match for this undertaking, although I had no choice but to act on the Supreme Commander's order and attempt to wipe out Guderian. We had too little strength for it, despite air sup-

port and very modest reinforcements, which were moved in by Supreme Headquarters.

Our offensive went off to a start on September 2. In the meantime, Guderian reached the Desna on September 1 and seized a bridgehead on its left bank near Shostka. The 21st Army, which had been transferred to the Bryansk Front Command on August 25, was outflanked from east and west by the 2nd Panzer Group and 2nd Field Army. Having lost contact with its neighbours, it began to retreat hastily southward to the Desna. The gap between the 21st and the rest of the Bryansk Front grew so big we could not exercise control. Besides, no uninterrupted line of defence existed in the line of the enemy's southward advance from Shostka to Chernigov. Covered by strong panzer and motorised troops from any surprises the Bryansk Front might have sprung on him, the enemy moved rapidly southward.

Yet the Bryansk Front was in no way relieved of its responsibility for the safety of Moscow. It was therefore impossible to borrow any troops from, and thus weaken, the Roslavl sector. Neither the Bryansk Front Command, nor Supreme Headquarters had any clear idea of the situation. We had no accurate information of enemy intentions, nor of his strength.

On the day I had my conversation with Supreme Headquarters I got in touch by phone with my southern neighbour, General Mikhail Kirponos. I told him about the situation on the Bryansk Front and expressed the fear that the enemy might drive a wedge between us in a flanking movement towards Moscow through Bryansk. Kirponos said he was less troubled about the northern flank than the southern, because the Supreme Command was stationing the 40th Army in full strength on his north, and it would no doubt cover his South-Western Front effectively. Kirponos was worried about his junction with the Southern Front and about the insistent Supreme Command demand to hold Kiev at any price.

But let us go back to our account of unfolding events. Tense fighting proceeded all along the 13th Army front and the left wing of the 50th Army from August 24 to 30. This was a harrowing week for all the troops of the Bryansk Front, for it was still, in effect, in its formative

period. And it was doubly hard on the 13th Army, which had been badly bled in previous battles. The enemy struck out frontally, and on its flanks. Immediate help was called for, or the 13th would crumble and its front would be breached in a sector most perilous for the capital. Guderian's troops facing our front had anything but a passive assignment. If they had succeeded in late August or early September to disrupt the Bryansk Front defences, Hitler may have summoned enough strength to follow up and advance on Moscow.

We did our best to help the hard-pressed 13th Army. We made up our mind to give it all the reserves we would get, but unfortunately they had not arrived. The air arm was the only tangible source of effective aid. So we appealed to the Supreme Command once more for air assistance. Supreme Headquarters was aware of the plight of the Bryansk Front. Moreover, it knew troops allotted to it had not yet reached their destination. It was essential to win time. It took this into account and gave us air strength from its own reserve. The Air Force Commander was ordered to send a group of his staff generals to the Bryansk Front and employ air strength operating in other sectors to organise a series of massive air assaults.

Furthermore, by August 28 the Front assumed operational control of the Reserve Air Group of the Supreme Command. Supreme Headquarters informed me that a reserve force of four air regiments was standing by in the Bogodukhov area north-west of Kharkov.

I was ordered to get in touch with their commander and inform him that his force was being temporarily placed under Bryansk Front orders. I established contact immediately through General Staff and by a plane, for I intended to use the group in the Novgorod-Seversky-Starodub sector. With air help a counter-blow by ground forces would, I hoped, wipe out the enemy concentration there, whose six divisions were executing a converging drive on Starodub since the morning of August 28.

The air reinforcement was highly effective. It prevented the enemy from smashing our 13th Army and inflicting a serious defeat on the rest of the Bryansk Front.

The Air Force operations group sent to us from Moscow was extremely helpful, particularly to General Polynin, our



A smashed German tank

air arm chief. We drew up the plan of an air offensive against enemy mobile troops. It was to begin on August 30, but was delayed a day due to bad weather, and lasted ten days. The number of sorties was as originally planned. Control and co-ordination, however, were very complicated, because we used planes based on airfields far removed from each other.

Our air strike may probably be described as the start of massive raids by Soviet planes in the Great Patriotic War.

In the morning of August 28 the 47th Panzer Corps, which earlier opposed the 50th Army front, mounted an offensive with its 17th and 18th panzer divisions, the 29th Motorised Division and armoured detachments in the general direction of Trubchevsk and south, the main force delivering a converging blow in the Pochep-Semtsy-Mostochnaya area, outflanking the southern wing of our Front at Pogar and Trubchevsk. A supporting nazi blow was struck towards Znob Station.

By that time units of the 13th Army, which were retiring to Unecha to defend a line from Pochep to south of Starodub, engaged the enemy's panzer divisions on the Sudost River. Unable to stem the nazi push and suffering heavy losses, the 13th began a withdrawal across the Desna.

The combat order issued on August 29 required the 50th Army, which was fighting hard in the Pochep area, to cling to its line. The 13th was ordered to strike at Pogar and Voronsk. It was to hit the enemy armoured groups that had wedged themselves deepest into our defences. Our air arm covered the attacking troops on August 29, 30 and 31, and was to co-operate with them during the subsequent development. The three 13th Army divisions assigned for the counter-blow got off to a good start, but were then turned back and began a withdrawal. The situation on the 13th Army front could not have been more dramatic.

The Bryansk Front's mobile group, consisting of the 108th Tank Division, the 141st Tank Brigade and the 4th Cavalry Division, commanded by my Deputy, Mj. Gen. Yermakov, and a group of staff officers, had just been formed and was not yet entirely battleworthy. Yet we had to rush it into the battle on the right flank of the 13th Army. It mounted an action in the general direction of Pogar with the object of annihilating enemy forces that had crashed through our lines. A fierce duel ensued with nazi panzers. This averted a rout of the 13th Army and a withdrawal across the Desna, which would have involved the abandonment of Trubchevsk. Our mobile group, which had only just detrained, enabled the 13th Army to restore order and resume fighting in co-operation with General Yermakov's tank units.

Our air arm afforded dependable assistance to the mobile group. Mazepov and I went to the forward CP in the Trubchevsk area and controlled the counter-attack on the spot. We had a chance to watch the splendid work of our aircraft in support of the tank attacks. On August 31 Soviet planes flew some 1,200 sorties and dropped as many as 4,500 bombs. Numerous panzers and no less than 800 motor vehicles were destroyed. Forty fires were observed in the enemy columns. Fifty-five enemy planes were downed or rubbed out on airfields before they had time to take off. Our own air losses totalled 41 planes.

That day the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformbureau) reported the air action on the Bryansk Front.

"Soviet airmen are fighting the nazis fearlessly," the report said. "Nine attack planes under Major Lozhechnikov spotted a German transport plane. The enemy pilot endeavoured to escape, but Major Lozhechnikov outstripped the nazi and shot him to shreds as he was attempting to land. During the pursuit, the Major detected camouflaged enemy planes. The Soviet planes swooped down and destroyed 18 nazi planes. Senior Lieutenant Kuznetsov's flight bombed and strafed a fleet of 200 German motor vehicles. Several dozen were set ablaze or damaged. Junior Lieutenant Simonov's flight attacked two German motor columns and destroyed more than 30 vehicles and the soldiers in them."

We were pleased that our planning of a mobile group while its troops and equipment were still en route, had fitted so well into the general picture.

We knew we needed as mobile and manoeuvrable a force to resist Guderian's mobile and manoeuvrable panzer divisions. Besides, we had picked the most advantageous place for it to concentrate, and the right time to engage it in battle, though it was not yet altogether ready for action.

By drawing the enemy into costly tank battles, our mobile group robbed him of the chance to follow up earlier successes and frustrated his scheme of capturing Trubchevsk. Our tankers acted boldly and skilfully. They drove deep wedges into the enemy's battle orders, breaking the front line. Reversed front scrimmages ensued, which developed into fierce tank battles at close quarters, highlighted by flanking assaults.

The battle, which reached its peak on August 31 some 20 kilometres west of Trubchevsk, involved 500-600 panzers and about 250 to 300 of our own tanks. The enemy lost a few thousand men and officers, and at least 200 panzers.

The enemy failed in his plan of capturing Trubchevsk and securing his flank for a southward advance and, possibly, paving the way for a subsequent assault towards the capital. In the 13th Army sector, it is true, the nazis managed to get a panzer division across the Desna in the vicinity of Znob Station, but our troops counter-attacked and drove it back to the other bank.

It will be of interest here to turn to Guderian's account of the events in his book. Here is what he wrote:

"On August 29 the enemy attacked the 24th Panzer Corps in strength from south and west with air support. The 3rd Panzer Division and 10th Motorised Infantry Division of the 24th Corps were compelled to halt their own advance.

"After completing its mopping-up assignment on the western bank of the Sudost, it was shunted closer to the 3rd Panzer Division in the Novgorod-Seversky area. That day I looked into the state of affairs at the 24th Panzer Corps and then at the 3rd and 4th panzer divisions, and decided to name August 30 as the day on which the 24th was to eliminate the danger to our flank from the right, and August 31 as the day when the offensive south-westward was to be resumed. The 47th Panzer Corps was to carry on with its advance along the eastern Sudost bank, and then along the Desna towards Novgorod-Seversky. . . .

"The bridgehead on the Desna was substantially extended by August 31, and the 4th Panzer Division had already crossed the river. The 10th Motorised Infantry Division, too, got across the Desna north of Korop, but was flung back to the other bank by a hefty Russian counter-attack, and, what is more, assaulted by a strong enemy force on its right flank. It was with extreme difficulty, by engaging the last remaining strength, that of the bakery company, that a disaster on the right wing was averted. In the sector of the 47th Panzer Corps the Russians were advancing from Trubchevsk west and north-west with their 108th Tank Brigade, and on September 1 also with their 110th Tank Brigade, and pushed back the brave 17th Panzer Division."*

Guderian goes on to relate at length that he was flustered by our determined counter-action and hastily appealed for reinforcements.

His insistent requests for aid, which the Hitler High Command described as panicky, and the failure of his drive on Trubchevsk, caused Guderian considerable annoyances, and he recalls the episode with shame and bitterness.

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 188.

In his "post-mortem" efforts to exonerate himself, Guderian refers to the numerical superiority of Soviet troops and equipment, although it was the nazis who had the odds in their favour.

On August 30, when battles raged at Pochep and Trubchevsk, we received orders from Supreme Headquarters to mount a general counter offensive against Guderian's panzer troops operative in the Bryansk Front sector.

Our troops were instructed to assume the offensive and strike out in the direction of Roslavl and Starodub, annihilate the enemy concentration in the Pochep, Novgorod-Seversky and Novozybkov area, and follow up in the general direction of Krychev and Slavgorod (Propoisk). By September 15 we were to have reached a line running from Petrovichi through Klimovichi, Belaya Dubrava and Guta-Koretskaya to Novozybkov.

This was not the best of decisions in the existing circumstances, because a simultaneous thrust on the right and left wings dispersed our strength, already depleted in previous battles. Besides, the contemplated thrust on Roslavl had no particular operational purpose at the time. The situation was more suited for a concentrated assault on Guderian's main force, or, more precisely, the flank of his principal build-up. This was what the Bryansk Front suggested, and I did my best to have our proposal of a powerful thrust approved. However, Supreme Headquarters would not see our point and accepted the proposal of the Reserve Front Commander, who thought it essential for the 50th Army to deliver a blow on Peklin Roslavl. If the four infantry divisions, plus the reserve division, that were operative on the right flank of the 50th Army and attacked toward Roslavl in support of the Reserve Front had, indeed, been used on the left flank of the 50th Army and struck jointly with the 3rd Army toward Starodub, the relation of strength would have been completely different.

Acting on the Supreme Command order of August 30, we worked out a plan of operations for August 31 to September 15. The plan was aimed at annihilating the Guderian panzer force opposing the Bryansk Front. Our assault was to be made in two directions—on Roslavl with the object of crushing the enemy in the Zhukovka-Dubrovka area, and south-west on Starodub with the object of crush-

ing the enemy in the Pochep-Starodub-Novgorod-Seversky triangle.

The 50th Army assembled a group of four infantry divisions, a tank brigade and a separate tank battalion for the counter-offensive on Roslavl, while the 3rd Army assigned an assault force of four divisions—of which one tank division and one cavalry division were already deeply engaged with the enemy—to mount an offensive towards Pochep. A shock group of the 13th Army, consisting of four divisions, depleted in previous battles, and one tank brigade would strike out towards Pogar-Starodub.

The general Bryansk Front counter offensive opened on September 2 and lasted until September 12. The particular counter-attack on the left flank, which we have already described continued all this time and merged with the common effort. In face of our onslaught, the enemy was forced to rush in an additional motorised corps against our 3rd and 13th Armies and deploy the infantry divisions of the 4th Field Army against our 50th Army.

The 50th Army's assault force ran headlong into stiff nazi resistance and fought savage battles with the enemy infantry.

On September 13 our attacking troops dug in at points reached in the offensive all along the front and regrouped in preparation for fresh assaults in selected directions. Although we failed to reach the line designated in the order of the Supreme Command, the counter-offensive was a distinct success. Our front moved forward an average of 10-12 kilometres, and considerably more at some points. The Soviet troops now held a line from Frolovka along the eastern bank of the Sudost to Znob and onward along the Desna eastern bank. By September 15 the 50th and 3rd Armies assumed the defensive. Their front became stable. They fortified their positions and reconnoitred extensively. Enemy attempts to mount an attack were repulsed.

The territorial gain made in the offensive was not very great, but the operational impact was. It was a time when the enemy held the initiative, when his panzer drives, supported by the Luftwaffe, followed in quick succession and the state of our troops, forced to retire deeper and deeper into the country, was anything but good. The determined action against the strongest and most mobile enemy force,

and action, moreover, that succeeded in pushing the enemy back, did a lot to boost morale and underscore the bravery and prowess and the splendid fighting efficiency of our men.

The battles tempered us. They gave us a better knowledge of the enemy and showed us how he could be flogged. The dread of panzers that afflicted some of our troops earlier in the war, gradually vanished.

The counter-offensive gave us valuable experience, which came in handy when the Bryansk Front troops found themselves operationally enveloped by the enemy in early October 1941 in the unspeakably difficult conditions of autumn in a marshy terrain, cut off from the rear and almost totally lacking supplies and logistics, outnumbered by the enemy, and the like.

The priceless experience of the September fighting helped the troops through. Far from losing heart in the ordeal, they displayed the utmost courage, bravery, wholesale heroism and unbending will-power, which helped them survive the envelopment and ultimately break the nazi ring.

The boastful nazi press announced the capture of Bryansk on September 3. In fact, however, enemy troops had not attained any tangible success in either the Roslavl-Bryansk, Pochep-Bryansk or Trubechevsk-Bryansk sectors, despite superior strength in panzers, armoured vehicles, motorised infantry and tactical air units. Not only did they fail to capture Bryansk, but were driven back from their positions by the Bryansk Front counter-offensive with heavy losses. As a result, the nearest they came to Bryansk was 60 kilometres.

By the end of our operation nazi casualties added up to 20,000 killed, wounded or taken prisoner. Our troops destroyed some 300 enemy panzers, about 1,000 motor vehicles and all of 200 Luftwaffe planes. A large number of heavy and light machine guns and several thousand rifles were captured.

Prisoners from the 10th and 11th companies of the nazi 107th Infantry Regiment testified that their companies had consisted of 160 soldiers and 5 officers each before the fighting broke out. On September 8 and 9, the prisoners said, the companies had no more than 60 soldiers each and

some 3 officers, and as little as 30 soldiers and no officers by September 12.

On September 6 the 21st Army, which had been part of the Bryansk Front for ten days, was transferred into the charge of the South Western Front. It had been very difficult to provide it with control not only due to its remoteness from Front Headquarters, but also because of its supply base being situated in the South Western Front sector.

A gap of some 60 kilometres appeared on September 10 between the Bryansk and South Western Fronts. The area was promptly attached to the Bryansk Front, although Supreme Headquarters knew perfectly well we had no resources to fill the breach. True, Marshal Shaposhnikov said the Supreme Command would put the 2nd Cavalry Corps at our disposal, but it was not expected to arrive until a few days later. Ultimately, it did not arrive at all.

The gap between the two Fronts would have enabled the enemy to push ahead east and south. So we decided to seal it and prevent the enemy from striding out effortlessly on Shostka. We began shunting troops to the left wing. A combat area was quickly formed at Rylysk under Colonel Adrian Akimenko. His group was composed of the 127th and 160th infantry divisions, of which the latter had only just been formed. Akimenko's group was deployed to the left of General Yermakov's mobile group, consisting of the 21st and 55th cavalry divisions, the 121st and 150th tank brigades and the 183rd Infantry Division. All these were below strength. The tank brigades, for example, had no more than 20 tanks each.

The two groups were subsequently merged under the command of General Yermakov.

General Yermakov showed prolific initiative and perseverance in the extremely difficult conditions of the time and proved a gifted commander and brave soldier. But he could not turn the tide, because our left neighbour, the 40th Army of the South Western Front, was routed by the enemy, whose turn southward at the junction of the two Fronts had made effective action by the 40th doubly important.

The South Western Front Command had sized up the situation on the right flank correctly. On its insistent

request, the Supreme Command issued the order on August 20 to form the 40th Army in order to shore up the junction of the two Fronts and prevent the enemy from stabbing at the rear of the South Western Front. The 40th was made up of the 135th and 293rd infantry divisions, the 2nd Paratroop Corps, the 10th Tank Division and the 5th Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade.

For nearly a month, until mid September, the troops of the 40th Army fought delaying actions. More and more, these developed into isolated centres of resistance. Communications between the adjoining flanks of the two Fronts were frequently broken off and soon collapsed. The enemy won operational freedom. Yet the fact of deploying the 40th Army to the junction and its original highly active operations showed that the Front Command was doing its utmost to block the nazi advance southward. Its efforts failed, because the enemy outnumbered the 40th vastly in panzers and had complete control of the air. Furthermore, troop control was not entirely flawless. Our moves were behind time, which had deplorable consequences, because we did not know the enemy's intentions well enough. Guderian's panzer and mechanised force and the enemy's 2nd Field Army were pushing south through the gap between the Bryansk and South Western Fronts on a broad frontage from Chernigov to Konotop and reached the Priluki-Lokhvitsa area, where they made contact with General Ewald von Kleist's group advancing northward from the Dnieper.

In the six embattled weeks the men, commanders and political officers of the Bryansk Front fought bravely. They inflicted considerable losses on Guderian's panzer group and held firm in their defensive positions round Trubchevsk and in the Bryansk sector, displaying extraordinary courage and devotion.

Good political orientation had a beneficial effect. The men were told of the character of the war, of the collapse of Hitler's political and strategic plans, and of the importance of building up an effective military alliance of anti-fascist states and peoples against the German nazis and their allies.

Germany, the men were shown, would gradually exhaust her resources, while the resistance of the Soviet Army and

the partisans would mount. Morale was already drooping among the nazi troops, and this would bring the contradictions in the fascist coalition to the surface more and more. Our men were reminded of a statement by General Wilhelm Groener, who headed the German occupation of the Ukraine back in 1918.

"Anyone who wants to grasp the strategic nature of the eastern war theatre," Groener had said, "must not overlook historical recollections. Beside the gate of the vast lowland between the Vistula and the Urals, which is the home of one state and one people, stands the warning figure of Napoleon, whose fate should implant in anyone who attacks Russia a sense of horror and foreboding."

The soldiers were told at length about the growing might and increasing resistance of the Soviet Union. They were told of our inexhaustible reserves of manpower, of new armies being formed in the east of the country, of the nation's immense economic potential and of how the road was paved to ultimate victory by pre-war industrialisation and the conversion of agriculture to large-scale collective farming. At the same time, the soldiers were warned of the terrible danger to which the Soviet land was then exposed.

The numerous instances of heroism, devotion, bravery, tenacity and sensible initiative in the performance of orders were widely circulated through the army press and by word of mouth to boost morale. Instances of cowardice and misconduct were held up to public scorn.

The commanders, political officers, Communist Party members and members of the Young Communist League, together with the rank and file, summoned the soldiers to fight tenaciously and bravely. Descriptions of single combat against enemy panzers showed the men how to use available weapons, grenades and incendiary bottles, how to organise group fire at low-flying enemy planes, and how to take cover. Whenever encircled by nazi troops, the best men instilled good cheer and confidence, and encouraged their mates to jab and harry the enemy from behind his lines.

Political orientation also concentrated as part of combat training on briefing the men about enemy arms, nazi combat tactics, and revealed the weaknesses in Wehrmacht methods.

The Bryansk Front's Military Council devoted much of its energy to organising the partisan movement. Afanasy Pigurnov, Chief of the Political Department, who was a native of the Bryansk country and knew it well, was of immense help. Towards the end of August we had formed as many as 12 partisan detachments. A special conference at Front HQ on August 21 launched the partisan movement along co-ordinated organised lines. Many had fought as partisans in the Civil War. Eighty per cent were members of the Communist Party, and eight per cent of the Young Communist League. I took the floor at the conference and gave the partisan commanders advice and instructions, which were later compiled in a "Partisan's Memo". The memo contained Party instructions concerning the partisan movement and struggle behind enemy lines. Its pointers, the memo said, were no more than recommendations and could not be equally valid in the great variety of situations sure to arise. It urged partisans to sum up their experiences and compare notes with other partisan detachments.

The text of the partisan's oath was drawn up and approved at the conference.

Very soon the partisan detachments began reporting their early successes.

To sum up the record of the Bryansk Front from August 14 to September 30, 1941, we may say legitimately that its counter offensives, and particularly the counter offensive in the Trubchevsk area, inflicted considerable losses on the nazis and reduced the strength of the enemy assault force.

The Bryansk Front had had to fight savage battles from the day it was organised. While Supreme Headquarters was planning offensive actions, we were barely able in some sectors to stem the onslaught of Guderian's panzers and the motorised and infantry divisions of the 2nd and 4th Field Armies.

Enemy strength in our sector after August 24 has been described earlier. Now we might look into the developments more closely. The nazi 4th Field Army consisted of the 12th Army Corps of four divisions—the 31st, 34th, 167th and 258th. In reserve it had the 46th Army Corps, consisting of the 10th Panzer Division, the SS Reich Division, the Great Germany Motorised Regiment, and other units. Besides, it had the 53rd Army Corps of four infantry divisions.

The latter were dispositioned at Krychev, Kostyukovich, Roslavl and Mstislavl, that is, in a sector facing the Bryansk Front.

On September 7 the Command of Army Group Centre issued the order for Guderian's 47th Panzer Corps (18th panzer and 29th motorised divisions) to dig in along the Desna and Sudost rivers between Novgorod-Seversky and the Rog River confluence. All in all, enemy strength amounted to nine infantry divisions, and four panzer and motorised divisions, for the Great Germany Regiment was numerically equal to a division at full strength. As for the Bryansk Front, it consisted of 16 infantry, three cavalry and one tank divisions, of which more than half were divisions only on paper, having been reduced in previous battles to less than a regiment. Besides, the situation should be considered in its over all aspect, for the nazi turn southward occurred in our sector and nazi thrusts hit the flanks of our units, which had been oriented to attack frontally.

Towards the close of August and in early September we had to face what were in effect two enemy field armies and one panzer army, amounting to more than half the strength of Army Group Centre, which consisted of three field armies (the 2nd, 4th and 9th) and two panzer groups (the 2nd and 3rd). This will demonstrate convincingly, I should think, that the Bryansk Front had had to contend with a most arduous and difficult situation.

For all this, our troops advanced some 10 to 12 kilometres in accordance with Supreme Command orders and reached a line along the Desna River through Rukovich, Stolby, Dmitrovo and along the eastern bank of the Sudost to Znob, and from there along the eastern bank of the Desna. A further advance of, say, 30 to 50 kilometres (which would take 6-8 days longer) by approximately September 20 would have had no tangible effect, because the enemy's main forces had already reached the rear of the South-Western Front on September 15. Besides, the enemy offensive that involved the southward turn proceeded along a front of more than 200 kilometres. The badly depleted 13th Army and the 3rd, barely formed of equally depleted divisions, could have done little or nothing in the circumstances. At first, they clashed with nazi troops that

were turning south, that is, Guderian's 24th and 47th Panzer Corps, and the 13th and 43rd Army Corps of the 2nd Field Army, including the 35th temporary element, and later with the divisions of the 4th Field Army that took over the sector. Our air operation, though immensely helpful, could not have settled the problem without co ordination with a ground offensive at full strength. All the same, the Bryansk Front held firm in its positions and robbed the Wehrmacht protagonists of an immediate assault on Moscow of their best arguments

CHAPTER EIGHT

ENEMY STRIKES OUT FOR MOSCOW

The fighting from August 14 to September 30 constituted the first period of Bryansk Front operations. The second period began on October 1. By that time the nazi command had attained its goal in the southern sector of the Soviet-German front. After capturing Kiev it massed Army Group Centre, considerably reinforced, for a drive toward Moscow.

Mention has got to be made of the tragic fate of our neighbour, the South-Western Front, because it had immediate repercussions in the Orel and Bryansk areas.

We could see at the end of August that the enemy had made up his mind to strike powerful blows at the flanks of the South-Western Front. The nazis were extending their staging area and headed directly for Kremenchug, spreading out northward. It was clear that the enemy intended to thrust northward against Konotop and Romny, press on southward, and strike out from Kremenchug northward on Lubna. This would bring him far into the rear of the South-Western Front.

Fresh anti-tank reserves, manpower and massive air strikes were essential to hold the enemy assault forces in check. The South-Western Front had nothing of the sort. A small strength (two or three infantry divisions and two or three artillery regiments) could be shunted from the Kiev area and areas south to delay the nazi assault force for some five or six days. But this would not localise the blow.

Mj.-Gen. Tupikov, Chief of Staff of the South-Western Front, suggested shoring up the flanks by deploying several infantry divisions and artillery regiments and withdrawing the main forces to the Sula or Psel rivers. A few more

infantry and artillery units could be assigned to the reserve in the course of the withdrawal, which would probably have averted encirclement. The troops were badly battered in two months of previous action. Their combat efficiency was low, they were morally depressed, and resistance in a pocket was not likely to be tenacious. Yet General Tupikov's proposal was turned down by the Front's Military Council on the insistence of the Supreme Command.

The outcome was that a considerable portion of South-Western Front troops was encircled and wiped out or taken prisoner. The command, too, shared this tragic fate.

Here is a brief account of the events at the South-Western Front.

On September 16, 1941, the CP of the South Western Front was located near the town of Piryatin in the village of Verkhoyarovka. Here, the Military Council of the Front came to the decision to withdraw across the Sula River to the Psel River. But it was discovered that all the roads in that area were already straddled by enemy infantry and panzers.

By September 17-18 communications between the Military Council and the Supreme Command were broken. On September 18, at Gorodishche, it was decided to withdraw to Voronki. The Military Council and South-Western Front HQ had about 3,000 men with them at the time. On September 19 they made one more attempt to break out of the enemy ring. A shock force was formed for this purpose under Mj.-Gen. Bagramyan, the Chief of Operations of Front Headquarters. The rest of the force was to follow on the heels of Bagramyan's group.

Bagramyan's group broke the enemy ring, followed up its success and subsequently joined the main Red Army forces. But the nazis managed to close the breach at once, and the Military Council force lacked the strength to repeat Bagramyan's exploit.

At dawn, on September 20, 1941, the column of the Military Council concentrated in a wood near the village of Dryukovshchina. It had six or seven armoured cars, four anti-tank guns and several quadrupled machine guns. There were no tanks at all, and there were about 800 men, mostly officers.

It was getting light quickly and the column had to con-

ceal itself somewhere until nightfall. The wood was no more than 100 150 metres wide and about 1 kilometre long. It consisted of lime, oak and elm trees and dense brush. A brook gurgled near-by.

In the morning of September 20 a dense fog settled over the wood. The men prepared for action. The people from the near-by village supplied them with food.

At about 9 or 10 in the morning, however, the fog lifted, the sun appeared, and it grew warmer. The decision was to stay in hiding all day, and to march on after dark, because open terrain lay ahead.

A group of enemy panzers in combat formation appeared around 10 a.m. from east and north-east. It opened fire in stride, and was followed by squads of submachine-gunners. Also, the nazis began shelling the wood with mortars. The men and officers, armed with rifles and submachine guns, the Front Commander at their head, assumed perimeter defences on the fringe of the wood. The anti tank guns and armoured cars fired on the panzers. The Soviet force counter attacked time and again. The enemy advanced but slowly. Wounded soldiers and officers still able to hold a rifle, continued to fire, while the more seriously wounded were carried deeper into the wood.

General Kirponos, the Front Commander, was wounded in the left leg during one of the counter attacks. Enemy tanks surrounded the wood. The nazi shelling intensified. By 18.00 hours Kirponos and the surviving officers retreated to the brook deeper in the wood. A mortar shell exploded and fragments hit Kirponos in chest and head. The wounds were mortal. He died a few minutes later

Burmistenko, the Member of the Military Council, looked at his watch and said: "It will be dark in about 40 or 50 minutes and we shall be saved. Let's form a group of officers and make a break at 9 p.m."

A few hours after the nazi attack all our armoured vehicles, anti-tank guns and machine guns were out of action. The defenders in the wood had nothing but submachine guns, pistols and grenades. When darkness fell, the enemy, who had completely surrounded the wood, blocked all possible routes of retreat and continued shelling the small Soviet force. The ranks of the Soviet soldiers thinned perceptibly, but they did not lay down their arms.

Some Red Army officers being seriously wounded and unable to move, shot themselves rather than surrender. Most of the men lost their lives in the unequal battle. Only a few managed to slip out of the nazi ring and join the main Red Army force, and a few were taken prisoner.

At dawn on September 21 Major Gnenny and Senior Political Officer Zhadovsky crept to the body of Gen. Kirponos, took off his greatcoat and the Star of Hero of the Soviet Union, and cut off all insignia. They hid the commander's body in the underbrush and covered it with branches and leaves.

Under cover of night on September 21, after the enemy had completely surrounded the wood, a small group of Soviet officers headed by Mj.-Gen. Tupikov tried to break out of the ring. On their way to Avdeyevka village they expected to find shelter in a deep gorge overgrown with oak, lime and brush. But, apparently, the attempt failed. The enemy ring was too dense. Only a few officers managed to reach Avdeyevka and save themselves.

Resistance by the troops trapped in the wood continued until September 22. On the following day the people from Iskovtsy, Dukhovshchina and Avdeyevka came to the wood and saw many dead Red Army men, most of whom were officers. They related that many of the officers were still gripping their pistols. The pistols contained no cartridges.

"They fought to the last, and fired the final bullet at themselves," the collective farmers said.

This was one of the disastrous effects of Stalin's crude disregard for the elementary rules of military strategy.

But this was not all. The enemy had occupied a large section of the Ukraine as he had planned. He had thus made his southern flank secure and laid his hands on the resources of the country's wealthiest regions. This gave him a free hand to concentrate for an offensive on Moscow, the Soviet capital.

The nazi plan was to cut up the Soviet defences frontally with strong thrusts from Dukhovshchina, Roslavl and Shosika in the eastern and north-eastern directions, and to encircle and annihilate the troops of the Western and Bryansk Fronts in the Vyazma and Bryansk areas before they would retire towards Moscow. Subsequently, powerful mobile pincers were to envelop Moscow from west and

south-west, and enable the 9th, 4th and 2nd armies to seize the capital.

Hitler's directive to mount this decisive operation, known under the code name of Typhoon, was issued on September 16.

Preparations for the operation took the nazis about a fortnight. They retired for regrouping. Army Group Centre was generously reinforced. By the end of September its strength increased from 58 divisions, of which 46 operated towards Moscow, to as many as 77 (including 14 panzer and 8 motorised divisions), which were concentrated against three of our Fronts—the Western, Reserve and Bryansk. The 77 nazi divisions, by the way, amounted to 38 per cent of all German infantry and 64 per cent of all German panzer and motorised divisions deployed on the Soviet-German front. The divisions were all brought up to full or nearly full strength. The Army Group Centre offensive had the support of the 2nd Luftwaffe fleet of 950 planes. Enemy superiority in personnel was 1.4 to 1, tanks 2.2 to 1, guns and mortars 2 to 1, and planes more than 2.5 to 1.

As we see, one of the main springboards for the assault on the Soviet capital was contemplated in the Bryansk-Orel sector.

Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group was reinforced to seize this area as quickly as possible. Now, it consisted of 7 infantry, 5 panzer, 4 motorised and 1 cavalry division and a motorised brigade.

In the Roslavl sector, the 50th and 3rd Soviet Armies were faced by three army corps of the nazi 2nd Field Army.

According to Guderian's memoirs, his panzer forces (rechristened the 2nd Panzer Army on October 6) were deployed as follows on September 30:

"The 48th Panzer Corps struck out from Gadyach-Shtepovka through Nedrigailov towards Putivl....

"The 24th Panzer Corps pushed from Glukhov to Sevsb and Orel. Its 3rd and 4th panzer divisions were in the van, followed by the 10th Motorised Division.

"The 47th Panzer Corps (18th and 17th panzer divisions) set out from Yampol. Their right flanks advanced towards Sevsb.

"The 29th Motorised Division was to follow up obliquely on its right towards Serebina Buda.

"The two corps (the 35th and 34th Army Corps) assigned to cover the flanks struck out as well. Part of their strength advanced through Kostobobry and part through Romny. The 1st Cavalry Division was dispositioned on the western bank of the Sudost north and south of Pogor."*

In the Bryansk sector, as we see, the enemy outnumbered us 2 to 1 in personnel and as much as over 10 to 1 in tanks. His numerical superiority in the sector of the main effort was still greater.

The general offensive on Moscow began on September 30. Making the most of his greatly superior strength the enemy struck first against our left wing in the sector recently attached to the Bryansk Front, where the 13th Army adjoined Yermakov's mobile group. The assault was made by the 47th and 24th Panzer Corps. Two days later, a powerful blow was struck on two other fronts defending the Moscow direction.

Units of the 13th Army and Yermakov's group, which had received orders to assume the defensive on September 28, put up a stiff resistance. Enemy personnel surpassed them in number 2.6 to 1, and 4.5 to 1 in guns and mortars. As for tanks, the enemy's superiority was absolute, because the Soviet troops had practically no armour. By the evening of September 30, the 13th Army was fighting off enemy motorised infantry and panzers advancing on Sevsik and Suzemka. Enemy pressure was particularly strong on the 13th Army's left wing.

Yermakov's group withdrew eastward in the evening, and communications with it were interrupted.

By the evening of October 1 panzer and motorised units pressed on in the 13th Army sector to occupy Serebina Buda, and some 25-30 panzers reached Komarichki Station. In the meantime, Nazi armoured units and infantry of the 24th Panzer Corps, supported by 150 panzers and 30 to 40 planes, swarmed forward in Yermakov's sector, captured Sevsik by 13.00 hours and cut the group off from the 13th Army. Also, the Nazis threatened to envelop the entire left wing of the Bryansk Front with a large panzer and

* Guderian, *op. cit.*, S. 206-08.

mechanised force. The enemy had some 500 panzers in this area. The 24th mounted an offensive from the Sevsk sector towards Orel, the 47th Panzer Corps towards Karachev and Bryansk, and the 29th Motorised Division, reinforced by infantry and machine-gun units, stabbed at the 13th Army flank in an all-out effort to penetrate its defences. The flanking blow was aimed at the Army's weakest spot, and created the peril of total envelopment for the whole of our Front

On October 2 the situation grew still worse. The nazi 2nd Field Army tore through the defences of the 43rd Army in the Reserve Front sector on our right, and went on developing its success at the limiting point of our 43rd and 50th Armies. On October 5 the enemy captured Zhizdra and imperilled the right flank and rear of the 50th Army. It was all too obvious that units of the 2nd Field Army were intent on joining east of Bryansk with Guderian's troops and thus closing the ring round the whole of our Bryansk grouping. The enemy offensive on our left wing continued. The nazi 47th and 24th Panzer Corps parried a 13th Army counter-attack at Khutor Mikhailovsky and seized Orel on October 3, extending the semi-circle round the Bryansk Front from the east.

The fall of Orel put an important administrative centre and major railway and road junction into nazi hands. It became a base for further enemy troop operations.

On October 4 the 47th Panzer Corps occupied Lokot and pushed on towards Navlya and Sven. Other enemy units struck out towards Karachev. By the morning of October 6 the Bryansk Front troops that still clung to their defence lines in the west were outflanked. The enemy had control over all the principal communication lines and closed the routes of our logistical system. A group, consisting of the 108th Tank Division (with a meagre 20 tanks) and the 194th Infantry Division, was formed under Lt.-Gen. Max Reiter, my Logistics Deputy, to protect the Karachev district from the rear. The supply chiefs thus had to double as combat leaders, while taking care of logistics.

The withdrawal of the logistical system of the Bryansk Front in early and mid-October proceeded in highly complicated circumstances. Guderian's troops advancing from the Khutor Mikhailovsky area in a north-easterly direction



Tank supported infantry attack

cut off the supply services from the troops. Their personnel had to fight off enemy attacks as they rolled back towards Mtsensk and Tula.

The enemy panzer group scrambling towards Karachev from Orel, which made little or no progress at first, turned south and struck out along forest trails for Bryansk.

Our position became more perilous by the hour on both flanks—on the right the 43rd Army of the Reserve Front was backtracking under enemy pressure, the nazis emerging on the flank and in the rear of our 50th Army, while on the left, where I spent October 3, 4 and 5, the situation was even more disastrous. We had nothing to put into the field against the several panzer, motorised and infantry divisions that were building up a strong and rapid stab at our back, while another massive enemy force was investing the flank of the 13th and 3rd Armies.

At night on October 23, I reported our plan of action to Shaposhnikov. Mazepov and my Chief of Staff, General Zakharov, Political Department Chief Pigurnov and Leonid Sandalov, the recently arrived Chief of Operations, were

present. By the evening of October 2 we could tell where the enemy was aiming his main effort from the headway he made into the deep layers of our defence. I gave Shaposhnikov a brief outline of our position, which was anything but favourable due to the flanking thrusts of the enemy.

It may be appropriate to note at this point that the Command and Headquarters of the Bryansk Front had drawn the pertinent lessons from the painful belting we got in September. When Guderian's group was making its turn north we were on our toes, following the quickly changing situation in order to deny the enemy the element of surprise. The nazi manoeuvre was patently clear to us this time and we lost no time in devising appropriate counter-measures. This is just what I reported to the General Staff Chief, for I needed his endorsement before I could make any radical alterations in our operational planning. In the event of the enemy's reaching our rear, we planned to retire our troops at once and hit the enemy in strength, with no more than a quarter or one-third of the troops covering the Front, and then take up new lines specified by the Supreme Command.

With his usual tact, Shaposhnikov retorted that the Supreme Command had a different opinion. They did not think it wise to manoeuvre and instructed me to hold firm in the present positions. I knew it was useless to object. The job now was to make sure our troops would stand their ground along the existing line. The brunt of the responsibility for the safety of the capital fell on our shoulders. We drove with heavy heart to the left wing of the Bryansk Front from Korachev to Sevsik in the hope of stemming the enemy attack on the 13th Army's left flank. We did everything we could to wipe out the marauding nazi troops there with a thrust by the 13th Army's left flank from the north and Yermakov's simultaneous jab from the south.

The fighting raged savagely for four days and nights—October 2, 3, 4 and 5. Our troops battled stubbornly, but had insufficient strength to make any headway. Yet it was heartening that the 13th Army did not abandon any of its positions. This was a victory in its own rights. We won time and retained the space we needed desperately to organise a subsequent counter-offensive with a reversed

front. As for General Yermakov's group, it had no choice but to roll back towards Amon in face of strong nazi panzer divisions.

This account would not be complete if we overlooked the actions of the 42nd Tank Brigade and 287th Infantry Division. They showed courage beyond compare in counter attacks on October 3, 4 and 5. Mazepov and I were in their sector and assisted their commanders in organising combat. On October 5 enemy panzers finally managed to cut into our lines and drove our temporary CP to the edge of a swamp. Our cars and the radio van were stuck. The officers of the Operations Department, Mazepov and myself became foot soldiers. What was worse, we were deprived of our means of communication. Yet it was essential that we contact Moscow at once and take appropriate measures to instil order in troop control and regroup our forces. We forded a river, flagged down a passing lorry and drove on to the town of Lokot, from where we set out in a Po 2 plane for Bryansk Front Headquarters. This flight over the combat zone was a precarious one, for, firstly, the enemy held control of the air, and, secondly, the plane was meant for no more than one passenger, while two of us, Mazepov and I, had crowded in. We reached an airfield near Bryansk and returned to the CP of the Bryansk Front near Sven Station in the evening of October 5.

At the CP I was briefed by Zakharov, the Chief of Staff, about the changes that had occurred during our absence, and instantly reported the situation to the General Staff.

The operational encirclement of the Bryansk Front troops was painfully obvious by that time. Again, I set out our plan, and pressed the Supreme Command for a quick decision. This time, Shaposhnikov was more amenable. He promised to inform the Supreme Commander and transmit his decision to us without delay.

We spent an agonising night, October 5/6, waiting for the reply from Supreme Headquarters. At 9 in the morning I tried to get a bit of sleep. On waking up I asked at once whether an order had arrived from Moscow. It had not. Situation reports came in by telephone from the armies. Communications were reliable enough with all of them, save Yermakov's group. I had learned the evening before from a tank commander that the enemy had crashed into

the southern outskirts of Karachev, but that the northern and western sections of the town were still held by our troops. The bridge in the town had been blown up, which prevented the enemy from proceeding along the Bryansk highway from Karachev to Bryansk.

I issued orders to reconnoitre the dirt road running parallel to the highway from Karachev to Bryansk.

At 14.30 hours on October 6, panzers and motorised infantry of the 17th Panzer Division, which followed forest trails south and south west of the Bryansk highway, skirmished with our security detachment and stumbled on our CP. This is always a stark possibility in mobile warfare, where tanks, vehicles and paratroopers are liable to infiltrate the depth of the opponents' defences and raid head quarters, even headquarters of armies and fronts. Enemy panzers advanced along the forest road in single file, shooting sporadically to left and right.

Our CP was quartered in two houses in a dense pine wood near Sven Station. One of the houses was occupied by the Bryansk Front Military Council, and the other by the Political Department. The other departments and services were in dug outs. The enemy did not know the exact location of our HQ and assumed in all likelihood that it was closer to Bryansk or in the city itself. In substance, the panzers drove through CP territory, keeping up a steady fire, but took no particular notice of us. The firing damaged no more than a couple of our staff cars.

I was looking through the latest sitreps and maps when my aide barged into the room and said. "Comrade Commander, enemy panzers are heading for the CP. They're about 200 metres away." I rushed to the porch and saw the lumbering vehicles.

The Chief of Staff and Member of the Military Council had also been warned of the danger by an orderly and drove away hastily to the auxiliary CP near Belev, which they reached by the morning of October 7. They got in touch with Supreme Headquarters and reported that the Commander of the Bryansk Front, that is, I, was killed at the Front CP during a surprise panzer attack at about 16.00 hours on October 6.

When the nazis stumbled on our CP it was, so to say, operating in full gear and communications were being

maintained with Moscow and the headquarters of the various armies. Things were ticking along like clockwork. Many of our operational documents were on hand, and it would be a dead loss, and a cause of trouble, if they fell into enemy hands. They had to be saved, but this was no easy proposition with the nazis a stone's throw away. The panzers were rumbling past within sight. We heard their tracks clanging.

I took charge of the IIQ staff and security guards. We engaged the enemy motorised infantry which was following the panzers in lorries. The enemy was caught unawares and suffered losses. Three of our tanks arrived to help us, followed by two artillery battalions and 300 men of the infantry unit of our tank brigade. In the meantime, our communication facilities were dismantled and carted to the new CP. All our documents were saved.

I instructed Col. Pankin, chief of IIQ company, to withdraw and drove to 3rd Army Headquarters.

On reaching the 3rd Army I issued the order to reverse our Front. I was able, too, to assume personal command of the 3rd and 13th armies' move. A coded version of the order was radioed to the 50th Army. Troop control continued without any interruption. Communications were broken off for no more than the few hours it took me to reach the 3rd Army.

The enemy command thought that the successful thrust of the 17th Panzer Corps towards Bryansk meant the pocket round our Front was sealed and the foremost objective of the 2nd Panzer Army thus fulfilled. On the strength of this judgement it issued an order to resume the offensive on October 7. The plan was to drive on towards Tula and then on to Kolomna, Kashira and Serpukhov, with the southern flank first capturing Kursk.

In the morning of October 6 the Bryansk Front was still holding firm in its westward positions, frustrating savage enemy attacks. At the same time, it had to fight off nazi actions in the rear. During the day, the enemy penetrated the rear of the 50th Army and a strong jab along the forest road from Karachev through Sven culminated in his capturing Bryansk.

Having seized Zhizdra, Karachev, Orel, Kromy, Dmitrovsk, Orlovsky, Sevsk, Lokot, Navlya and Bryansk, the nazis

straddled all our principal lines of supply. Operationally, therefore, the Bryansk Front was totally invested. The enemy strained, with drives at the rear of our armies, to cut up our lines and annihilate our troops piecemeal.

The nazi success was greatly facilitated by our lack of sufficient reserves to repulse the assaults on our flanks and rear. Another thing in the nazi's favour was that our defences in and around Orel, far from the original battle lines, were, in effect, non-existent. This relieved the nazis of all fear for their rear from the east when turning their front westward against us. Besides, the nazis had vastly superior numbers and, on top of that, the comfort of successes in neighbouring sectors.

But back to our account. As I said, I issued preliminary instructions early in the morning of October 7 to the commanders of the 13th and 3rd Armies, and released a general order at 14.00 hours of the same day to turn the front 180°.

The troops of the Bryansk Front faced the formidable job of pouncing on the enemy troops that had emerged in the rear of the Bryansk Front, of breaking the ring around it, and organising combat along new battle lines. To do this, they had to regroup and prime for a counter-blow against enemy forces on the flanks and in the rear. They also had to carry on their war of manoeuvre in the west, north and south.

As soon as communications with Supreme Headquarters were restored, I reported my location to the Supreme Commander and told him about the skirmish round our old CP at Sven. I reported briefly on my decision to counter-attack with a reversed front in order to break the nazi ring and assume a new line of defence.

In the meantime, 3rd Army HQ received a radiogram containing the copy of an order for the Commander of the 50th Army to assume the duties of Bryansk Front Commander. Having received the radio message of my Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters thought I was no longer among the living.

But things returned to normal when the armies received my order and the Supreme Commander was informed about my whereabouts.

By that time the enemy was streaming round the 13th Army's left flank and, as patrols reported, was poised to

strike in the general direction of Trubechevsk in order to close the pocket round units of the 13th Army.

What the 13th Army did in the circumstances has been described by Mark Kozlov, Member of the 13th Army's Military Council.

"Early in the morning of October 9," he writes, "the 132nd and 143rd infantry divisions with tanks of the 141st Tank Brigade jumped off for the attack in the Negino area. All the tractors we had were lined up on the forest's edge and revved their motors to imitate the roar of advancing tanks. The divisional artillery let loose. The assault was unexpected and successful. In Negino we wiped out some thing like a regiment of nazi infantry, captured regimental headquarters and put 15 anti tank guns out of action. The 132nd and 143rd infantry divisions and the first echelon of Army HQ passed through Negino.

"However, three hours later the enemy summoned all available strength and closed the escape route for the rest of the Army. A whirlwind attack by the 6th Infantry Division, which had just come to the scene, bored a new hole in the enemy lines, and was followed out of the pocket by part of the second headquarters echelon and the Army Commander's reserves."

Here is what Guderian had to say about the actions of the 13th Army.

"In the evening of October 8, 1941," he wrote in his memoirs, "a report came in from the 35th Corps that the enemy was putting strong pressure on the German troops north of Suzemki (west of Seysk). It was clear from this report that the Russian troops enveloped south of Bryansk were trying to break out eastward. . . On October 9 the Russians continued with their effort near Suzemki. They attacked the right flank of our 293rd Infantry Division and shouldered it away to Suzemki and Shilenka."

Guderian notes further that considerable strength had to be rushed to the area, including the 48th Panzer Corps. He admitted that troops of the 13th Army and Army Headquarters succeeded in crashing the line he had put up along the Seredina Buda Seysk road. He claims, however, that

* *Voenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, 1964 No. 5, p. 55

** Guderian, op. cit., S. 214

only "small groups" managed to get out of the pocket. This is untrue. It was large units and whole divisions that escaped the nazi ring.

I was with the 3rd Army when we reversed our front. The 3rd faced the most difficult assignment of all. In comparison with the other armies it had to march the greatest distance across almost impassable terrain, for the land from the eastern bank of the Desna and the entire stretch from Trubchevsk east and north-east to Svap River was marshy and the heavy autumn rains had made some places all but unapproachable.

To bolster morale and orient the troops in their difficult task, I issued an appeal to the men on behalf of the Front Military Council. Here is how the appeal ended:

"The Military Council of the Bryansk Front trusts that every fighting man, every commander and political officer of Kreizer's units will punish the enemy effectively and reach the line selected by the command in organised fashion."

On the night of October 7-8 the 3rd Army disengaged and made an overnight march of 60 km under cover of strong rearguard detachments.

Along the Uta-Arel'sk line the 3rd Army ran into organised enemy resistance, for the nazis had put up defences there in our old fortifications. The fighting along this line lasted from October 8 to 11. By October 12 our troops subdued the enemy and reached Saltanovka-Svyatoye. The nazis managed to organise defensive positions there as well in an effort to stop our withdrawal and compel us to surrender.

The only way to crash the nazi line was to strike at Navlya. This would be the decisive battle, because Navlya constituted the last strong enemy centre, and once it was passed, we would come to country more suitable for manoeuvre than the forests and marshes we were in at the time.

By October 12 the enemy had closed all routes out of the forest in the Navlya-Borshchevo-Pogreby-Lokot area. The assault we mounted on October 11 was unsuccessful. I decided to visit the companies in the sector of the 269th Infantry Division, which spearheaded the 3rd Army drive. It was about 4 a.m. when I came to one of the regiments

priming for attack. I visited nearly all the companies and talked to men and officers, trying to raise their spirits. After seeing the terrain at first hand, I decided it would be easiest to breach the enemy line in the direction of the little forester's hut I saw in the distance. The commanders of two battalions were instructed to envelop the enemy resisting stiffly in the Borshchevo area. This would ensure success in the break-through.

By 5 a.m. on October 12, two hours before sunrise, one of the battalions (of the 269th Infantry Division), struck out along forest trails and all but impassable terrain towards the forester's hut some 3 kilometres east of Borshchevo, reaching the rear of the enemy combat lines. In the meantime, a second battalion, which followed on the heels of the first, came to its appointed area and took up initial assault positions. The attack was to be made simultaneously from front and rear. To ensure surprise, the general assault was to be touched off by the attack of the battalion at the forester's hut. It would play the crucial role in the coming battle. The second battalion, which was also to stab at the enemy from the rear somewhat to the right of the first, would instantly "chime in" and mount the attack boldly and determinedly.

At about 5.30 a.m. Colonel A. Chekharin, Commander of the 269th, and I came to the southern outskirts of Borshchevo. In those agonising minutes of suspense both of us were deeply troubled. We could not maintain contact with the attack battalion, because a radio message or any other kind of communication could betray its location in the enemy rear. We feared that some unforeseen accident may upset our scheme and prevent the battalion from lashing out at the fixed hour. We were confident, all the same, that the battalion commander and his company chiefs would show the maximum of initiative, perseverance and devotion.

The time dragged. We waited with heavy hearts.

Suddenly, breaking the harrowing silence, we heard heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, grenade and mortar-shell explosions, and then, to top it all, the echo of a powerful Russian "hurrah". The long-awaited assault had begun. I pulled off my cap and heaved a sigh of relief.

About a kilometre south of the forester's hut the second battalion, too, jumped off almost simultaneously. It drove

towards Borshchevo along the railway embankment. Chekharin lifted his fingers to the cap, looked at me with tired eyes that gleamed with confidence and asked me for permission to sound the general frontal attack. A flare soared into the sky and the men of two regiments rose in attack chains supported by ten tanks, encouraged by the heroism of the two battalions in the enemy rear. The gunners, mortar men and machine-gunners supported the infantry and tanks with a wall of fire. The rain and sleet that had plagued us all night, stopped.

The appearance of our troops in his rear, coupled with our sudden and audacious attack, stunned the enemy. Good co-ordination by all our units helped us squash his defences. The nazis in the sector were wiped out and the route of escape from the forest lay open before us.

There was heavy fighting in the Borshchevo-Navlya area. The two divisions in our first echelon were unable to crash through. The whole 3rd Army was in a perilous situation. We had no fresh forces to build up an attack. It was essential that the men who had already exhausted all their strength in the previous futile assaults should regain their vigour. If we succeeded in flushing the enemy out of his positions in just a narrow sector of the front, we would probably be able to rally the men for bold, selfless action. One should always depend on the men first of all in coping with a problem. It is therefore necessary to show them what their action will mean for the army, the front and the country as a whole.

The fighting was savage and bloody. But it was successful. We ripped the enemy lines where we wanted it.

"On October 11 the Russian troops endeavoured to break out of the Trubchevsk kettle," wrote Guderian. "They advanced along both banks of the Navlya. The Russians swarmed forward into the breach between the 29th and 25th motorised divisions, held by the 5th Machine-Gun Battalion. . . .

"On October 13," Guderian wrote on, "the Russians persisted in their efforts to break out between Navlya and Borshchevo. We had to rush in a few units of the 3rd Panzer Division and the 10th Motorised Division, 24th Panzer Corps, to reinforce the 47th Panzer Corps. Despite this reinforcement, due to our loss of mobility, a Russian

group of some 5,000 men [a figure minimised severalfold.—A.E.] managed to break out and reach Dmitrovsk (Dmitrovsk-Orlovsky).”*

Guderian also wrote about the sagging morale of the Nazi troops. It was dropping fast despite seemingly spectacular successes due to our savage resistance, the vigour and tenacity of Soviet troops in their counter-attacks.

Smarting from the Soviet break-through in the Borshchevo-Navlya area, the enemy struck back more ferociously than ever with his air arm. All through October 12 and 13, he kept bombing the break-through area, attempting to stem or at least slow our withdrawal. Enemy aircraft caused us a lot of annoyance. We had very few anti-aircraft guns. To make matters worse, enemy planes had good guidance from the ground. We intercepted a conversation between an enemy plane and the ground, and heard ground point out targets in the Borshchevo area. The enemy spotter, it was plain, was within sight of these targets.

At about 8 a.m. on October 13, after a successful engagement that tore a gap in the enemy front, the Commander of the 269th Division, the Secretary of the Front Party Commission, a group of officers and I entered a little house in the eastern outskirts of Borshchevo after a sleepless night to have a bite to eat. We stayed there less than 30 minutes, and the Commander of the 269th even less, because he was anxious to get back to the forester's hut, where his CP was being set up.

A few minutes after we left the house, about a dozen Junkers dive-bombers appeared over Borshchevo. They formed a circle and began bombing the ill-starred house methodically. It was obvious that the enemy planes were being guided from the ground. This did not surprise us, for the area east of the village had but recently been in enemy hands and Nazi spotters had stayed behind our lines to guide their aircraft.

By 10 a.m. a group of officers and I returned to the forward CP to watch our attack. At first, I visited the CP of the 137th Division, commanded by Ivan Grishin, a brilliant officer. Then I went back to the CP of the 269th Division beside the forester's hut. The CP of the 3rd Army, where

I met Yakov Kreizer, the commanding officer, Fyodor Shlykov, Member of the Military Council, and Alexei Zhadov, the Chief of Staff, was located near-by. I satisfied myself that they were in full control of their troops. Twenty minutes after my arrival dive-bombers appeared overhead and began bombing the divisional CP and the gun emplacements in the vicinity.

I was wounded in the right leg and right shoulder by bomb fragments. The same bomb also wounded Secretary Shkumok of the Party Commission, a very capable functionary and a brave soldier. It was a miracle that we escaped with our lives, because the bomber covered us as we stood beside the house next to a big pine tree. I was leaning against the tree and watching the fighting through field glasses. Shkumok stood beside me and was telling me something about the Party membership. This was when the dive-bomber planted a bomb a mere 3 metres from us. Luckily, it exploded on the other side of the pine. This was what saved us. The air blast and the fragments stunned me and threw me on the ground. Shkumok's wounds were less serious. We were picked up, they dressed our wounds and carried us into the forest to my car. The car took us to the edge of the forest adjoining a field dotted with haystacks. A makeshift CP was organised at once beside one of these stacks. My aide, a few members of my staff and a medical officer stayed with me. I had full command of my senses.

About 10-15 minutes after the occurrence, Kreizer, Shlykov and Zhadov came to see me. They assured me they would do their best to complete the action. They informed the Supreme Command immediately about my being wounded. After dark on October 13, at about 20.30 hours, I was put into a Po-2 aircraft, which was to take me to Moscow on the instructions of the Supreme Command. My aide, V. Khirnykh, climbed into the plane with me.

Twice the aircraft failed to take off. The choice of the strip had been unhappy. It was a recently harvested field with tall stubbles. Besides, the sleet of the night before had melted and the soil was muddy.

Pavel Koshuba, the pilot, asked me to leave my aide behind, for this would make the plane lighter. I kept refusing, because I did not want to part with the brave and

loyal officer. Besides, I was in bad condition. His help and presence seemed indispensable. But in the end I had to give in with a heavy heart, and Khirnykh climbed out of the plane. On the following day Khirnykh was killed by a shell fragment. It was painful news to me, this death of a modest and courageous young man who had done his inconspicuous but necessary job so well.

After Khirnykh shook my hand and wished me a happy landing and left the plane, we finally managed to get off the ground.

Our aircraft gained altitude and headed for Moscow in absolute darkness.

At first, we flew south-eastward, then turned north toward Moscow. The darkness around us was almost impenetrable. In two places only did we see blazing fires. One of them, evidently, was in the Lokot area, and the other north of it, where our troops were engaged in heavy fighting.

The time dragged slowly. I was tormented by pain, thirst and cold. The autumn had set in and my only protection from the cold was a light overcoat. From time to time I lost consciousness, but kept regaining it. At one such moment I noticed that the noise of the motor had grown barely audible. "Seems, we've arrived," I thought. "We've been flying for ages. Why isn't it dawning?" Actually, as I was later told by Koshuba, we had been flying about 3 hours. I was losing consciousness again, but the coughing of the engine and the sensation of descent brought me to. "At last! We're landing," I thought, and a sense of peace pervaded me.

However, before I could realise what was going on, I felt a concussion. I was flung upwards, and was then dealt a stunning blow. The last thing I felt was that we were turning turtle. Then I lost consciousness again. I came to from a piercing pain in my left side, on which I lay, and from the cold. My wounded leg and shoulder hurt me badly. I lay for some time, knowing that something had gone badly wrong. At last I heard Koshuba's voice. He was asking me whether I was alive. I asked what had happened. He explained that the engine had stalled and that he had crashed in total darkness. Koshuba was on his feet. Luckily, he had escaped with just a few bruises. The reason why he had not come to my assistance at once was

that he had fainted—not so much from the bruises, it appears, as from the nervous shock.

I asked the pilot to look for some straw or firewood and make a fire. What I needed most was warmth. Koshuba walked off, lighting his way with a torchlight. He returned quickly and said there was a house near-by and that, evidently, we had landed near a village. I asked him to call for help. I have only a hazy recollection of what happened later. In any case, I knew I was being carried into a house. This robbed me of the remainder of my strength. I lost consciousness again and when I regained it I was lying on a bed and someone was giving me something warm to drink. I felt a little better after this, but soon lost consciousness again.

While I was lying unconscious in Pilyugino village, in the house of the Petyashins, the General Staff and the Supreme Headquarters were looking for me frantically. My Headquarters had informed them that I had taken off, yet the plane had not arrived in Moscow, though it had been due many hours before.

Some time later General Staff was informed about the crash of a Po 2 plane with a general on board.

In the morning on October 14 an ambulance with a doctor arrived from Moscow, and in the afternoon I was already put on an operation table at the Central Hospital headed by Col. Mandryka. The operation was a painful one. The doctors managed to extract the fragments from my leg, but a fairly large fragment was lodged securely in my chest. After the operation I was transferred to a ward. My fever ran high, though I did not lose consciousness any more. My condition was serious and I thought for a while I would not pull through.

On the night of October 15-16 the hospital was visited by the Supreme Commander. I was plagued by nightmares and do not remember the details of the episode, though scraps of it are imbedded in my memory. I was ablaze with fever, feeling as though my blood vessels were filled with molten metal. This is the condition in which Stalin found me when he came to the hospital in Serebryany Lane near Arbat Square.

At about 2 a.m. the door to my ward opened (it was on my right, and a window was on the other side of the room).

A group of people—Stalin in front, followed by the doctor and two other people whom I could not identify—entered the ward. Stalin came up to me and said: "Hello, Comrade Eremenko" (that was how he always called me). I did not reply. Stalin asked, "Why don't you say something, Comrade Eremenko?"

"I thought I was seeing things," I said.

Stalin laughed, and said "Hello" once more. I replied, "Hello, Comrade Stalin."

Stalin questioned me about the situation at the front. I replied briefly that the troops had been assaulting the enemy ring for eight days and had finally broken through. We had crashed through the third and last enemy line on October 13, I said, and our divisions began filtering out of the pocket that day in and around Borshevo. It was at the CP of one of the divisions, I added, that I was wounded.

"Why on earth did you go so close to the battle lines? You ought to have taken greater care of yourself. I'll talk to you about it when you are well," Stalin chided me.

I replied that war was war. It was a bad thing, I said, that the commander was wounded, but a good thing that the troops had broken out of the enemy pocket.

Stalin began reassuring me. He said I looked well and that he would see to my getting the best medical care. Turning to the doctors, he asked what they intended to do with me. The senior doctor said the hospital had been evacuated from Moscow and that I would also be sent to Kuibyshev.

"That's the right thing to do," Stalin said. He added that I should be sent by plane to Kuibyshev the following day.

"Yes, Comrade Stalin," the doctors said in unison, snapping to attention. Stalin spoke to me again: "Everything will be alright, Comrade Eremenko. You'll go to Kuibyshev tomorrow and I will telephone Prof. Spassokukotsky, the best surgeon we have, that he should put you on your feet as quickly as possible. Good-bye, Comrade Eremenko. See that you get well."

Stalin left the ward, followed by the others.

The situation in the capital was very grave at the time of my hospitalisation. I was to have been taken by plane to Kuibyshev on October 17, but the hospital administra-

tion had already evacuated all the wounded the day before. Twice, I was asked to go by train on October 16. "Why fly?" I was told. "We will put you in a nice train compartment. It is two days to Kuibyshev by train, and flying is not half as comfortable." Finally, I agreed. But as soon as I was brought to the train I realised that the trip would be anything but easy. I was to travel in a train of make-shift suburban carriages. I had to lie on my back and, being a stout man, there was not enough room for me on the berth. So I was put on the floor in the passage. Luckily, Col.-Gen. A. Khrulev, Logistics Chief of the Red Army, turned up at the station. He gave instructions to transfer me to the train chief's car. The train pulled out.

It took us more than a day and a night to reach Ryazan, where we were stuck indefinitely. I was feeling worse and worse. So I decided to stay in Ryazan. Through the station chief I asked for the secretary of the regional Party committee to visit me. The secretary, a man named Tarasov, a considerate and helpful man, came to the station and I talked him into transferring me from the train to a local hospital. The train chief, a funny kind of person, objected. He refused to let me go. The local authorities had to sign a receipt for me. From the train I was brought to the office of the Party secretary and telephoned the Air Force Commander in Moscow, asking him to take me by plane to Kuibyshev. My most fervent wish at the time was to get well quickly and return to the front. By morning the plane arrived in Ryazan and I was taken on to Kuibyshev, to the Kremlin hospital that had been evacuated there from Moscow. Professor Spassokukotsky treated me. I made good progress, but the shoulder wound bothered me all the same. The Professor was afraid I might have gas gangrene, because I still ran a fever.

Late at night on the tenth day of my treatment I had a telephone conversation with the Supreme Commander. It was about midnight on October 26. I was wheeled to the telephone on a stretcher.

I was handed the receiver, but nobody told me who was calling. So I identified myself: "Col.-Gen. Eremenko speaking." From the first words I heard, spoken with the characteristic pronunciation, I recognised Stalin.

"Congratulations, Comrade Eremenko, on what you have done," Stalin said. "Your troops have shown courage and stamina and good organisation while they were encircled. It is doubly gratifying that they fought with initiative and unparalleled audacity against a greatly superior foe in most difficult conditions. Your armies reached new lines and have inflicted palpable losses on the enemy."

Stalin added: "I congratulate you once more. The reason I call at this late hour is that I know you are waiting for news about your soldiers."

At the end of our conversation I begged to be shipped back to Moscow, so as to keep abreast of developments.

In Moscow, I was put in a temporary hospital at the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy. This was where I said my last good-bye to one of my best friends, Divisional Commissar Dmitry Lestev, Chief of the Western Front Political Department. When I was in command of the Western Front he had been Member of its Military Council.

He had visited me on November 16 and we chatted for hours. On the following day, Lestev sent me a note with a staff officer who had come on business to Moscow. I would like to quote it in full, because it is probably the last thing Lestev ever wrote:

"Hello, Andrei! How are you? Best wishes. I have a request: send me some cigarettes out of your private stock with the bearer. Something has gone wrong with our supplies. Greetings and wishes that you get well soon."

I gave the officer a supply of cigarettes and was about to get some sleep when a man was brought into the ward on a stretcher covered with a bedsheet. I asked who it was, and was informed it was Divisional Commissar Lestev.

"Is he badly wounded?" I asked.

"He's dead," the doctor replied.

It was not an unusual occurrence in wartime. All the same, I was deeply grieved. The day before the man had been brimming with energy and just 20 minutes before I had sent him some cigarettes. Now he was dead.

I was told Lestev had gone to one of the armies of the Western Front. The CP was badly placed in a row of houses along the Mozhaisk highway. Enemy planes were bombing the troops marching along the highway. One of the bombs burst near the house, where Lestev stood by

the window. A bomb splinter of no more than a centimetre hit Lestev in the back of his head.

I shall always remember Lestev, a fine Communist, a good man, a splendid comrade and the best of political officers.

But let us go back to the events on the Bryansk Front.

On October 9 the assault units of the 13th Army occupied Negino in a surprise attack. The nazis fled in a panic, abandoning a large number of vehicles and property. But they kept pounding our troops continuously from the air. Developing the counter-offensive, troops of the 13th Army fought stiff engagements through October 10 and 11 along the Glukhov-Sevsk road. The enemy was flung back to Sevsk with heavy losses.

On October 12 and 13 the fighting proceeded around Khomutovka. The enemy concentrated big strength in the area and attacked us from north and south. Our army lost some of its supply units and some of the artillery.

After enemy resistance was squashed, the army followed up on October 14, 15 and 16. The nazis suffered heavy losses and withdrew to Khomutovka. On the right flank of the 13th Army, our 6th Infantry Division cut the road from Rylsk to Dmitrovsk-Orlovsky on October 15.

Here is what General M. Kozlov, Member of the 13th Army Military Council, tells about this episode.

"The enemy," he writes, "guessed the direction of our break-through and organised strong defences along the Rylsk-Dmitrovsk road. By that time, ceaseless rains and sleet made the road impassable. To make matters worse, our fuel supplies ran out. The situation was disastrous. Fuel was air-dropped to us but there was too little of it, and we consumed it quickly on the bad roads. The gas-tanks of nearly all our vehicles, concentrated in one spot, were empty. The enemy knew it, brought up fresh strength and began an offensive. I saw our machine guns open furious fire from the vehicles, and the nazis taking to their heels. They left many of their mates killed in the field. But what next? There was no earthly chance of saving the vehicles. After an exhaustive analysis and pained thought, the Military Council decided on October 17 to destroy our motor

vehicles and other property in order to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. We shot armour-piercing bullets into the automobile engines and pushed the lorries down a deep gully. The gunners of our howitzer regiment fired their remaining shells at the enemy and used the last shell to put their guns out of action (by stuffing sand into the barrel before firing). We did all this with a heavy heart. The only consolation was that the enemy would never use what we abandoned. Besides, we destroyed our portable transmitters, all papers and the available cash of the army's finance officer.

"Gunnery, signals men, tankers and lorry drivers were issued rifles. At 1 a.m. on October 17 our troops crashed through the German lines on the Rylsk-Dmitrovsk road and destroyed German vehicles stalled in the mud."*

On October 17 and 18 the army fought savage actions at crossing points on the Svap River around Nizhne-Pesochny. An audacious attack of the 6th Infantry Division made the crossing secure. Its men mounted a bayonet charge under withering enemy fire. By the morning of October 18 the main forces of the 13th Army had crossed the river and reached Nizhne-Pesochny.

To relieve the 13th Army somewhat, General Yermakov's group was ordered to strike northward on Belayevo with its 2nd and 121st infantry divisions. The Bryansk Front air arm received orders to bomb enemy units obstructing the 13th Army. As a result, it managed to reach Belayevo.

On October 22 the 13th Army was out of the pocket. It had performed its task honourably and assumed defences along the Fatezh-Makarovka line. Despite the heavy losses, most of its divisions had more than 1,500-2,000 men.

"After the unbelievably difficult march in cold autumn weather, wet to the skin, undernourished, fighting day and night without a clear knowledge of the enemy's whereabouts--in front, right or left--the 13th Army broke out of the Nazi pocket with 10,000 men, all in possession of their rifles, 32 heavy and 34 light machine guns, 130 sub-machine guns and 11 field pieces. All Communists had their Party cards intact. Those who were left behind (the

* *Voyenno-istorichesky zhurnal*, 1964, No. 5, pp. 55-56.

wounded and the sick) stayed in the southern Bryansk forest and soon formed partisan detachments.”*

The 13th Army accounted for more than 3,000 enemy men and officers killed, 30 panzers and armoured cars, 650 lorries, 11 planes, 70 guns, 15 mortars, about 100 machine guns, etc. Despite strong enemy jabs at its left flank and rear, the army withstood the nazi onslaught and landed a series of strong blows on the enemy in its reversed-front offensive.

We have described the actions of the 3rd Army quite fully up to October 13. After a series of bold and determined attacks, units of the 3rd Army, too, crashed through and came out of the forests.

New battles broke out on October 15. The 137th and 269th infantry divisions and the 42nd Tank Brigade were engaged in the main effort.

From October 17 to 20 the 3rd Army was active east of Brasov in marshy terrain. On the night of October 20-21 it pierced the enemy front advancing across a swamp and crossed the Fatezh-Kromy highway held by the enemy, on October 23.

Thus, the 3rd Army, too, fulfilled its mission, consummated the reversed-front counter-offensive and reached its appointed line at Ponyri Station, where it assumed the defensive. All of its units reached this line, and although the divisions had suffered immense losses some of them still had more than 2,000 men.

The 3rd Army accounted for some 5,500 enemy men and officers killed, 100 prisoners, about 250 lorries, some 50 panzers and a considerable amount of other property.

It was the least numerous of the Bryansk Front Command. Besides, it had had to cope with immense difficulties. Its reversing the front was more complicated than that of the two other armies. Army Headquarters, headed by Alexei Zhadov, was of great help to me at the time the Front was being turned 180 degrees. Efficient communications were a godsend in the circumstances.

After the enemy captured Lyudinovo and Zhizdra, the 50th Army was compelled to deploy its right flank for coverage from the north and north-east. On October 7 it

* *Voyenno-istorichesky zhurnal*, 1964, No. 5, p. 57.



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was dispositioned along a line running from Olshanitsa through Ivot and Dubrovka along the Desna and Sudost rivers. Its right flank faced north, and its centre and left flank faced west. On October 7 and 8 its units began to retire to a new line.

On October 12 the 50th Army reached Khvastovichi and engaged a strong enemy force blocking its path to the east and south-east. After heavy fighting, the Army came to Podbuzhye-Karachev late on October 13 and concentrated for a crossing of the Resset River.

On October 14 the 50th swept enemy units out of its way and crossed the river under strong artillery and mortar cover. Enemy planes bombed it from the air. Losses were heavy. On reaching the other bank the troops encountered numerically superior enemy forces. The army swerved north-east, crashed through massive nazi lines and headed for Belev.

The enemy ring was broken. Palpable losses were inflicted on the enemy. By October 23 the 50th Army reached its new line along the Oka River in the Belev area, somewhat north of the line originally planned for it. Its 217th, 290th, 279th, 278th, 258th, 260th and 154th infantry divisions, a tank brigade, several separate infantry and artillery regiments and other units were all assembled. Many

of the divisions had up to 3,000 men, artillery batteries, signals battalions, and a few even had artillery regiments.

The 50th gave a splendid display of mobility. It is a credit to its men and officers that they inflicted heavy losses on the enemy during the reversed-front offensive, broke the enemy ring in fairly good condition and occupied a new line of defence. Mj.-Gen. Petrov, the Army Commander and Brigade Commissar Shlyapin, Member of the Military Council, both of them stalwart sons of their country and splendid soldiers, fell in the operation.

I should like to refer at greater length here to Mikhail Petrov, the Commander of the 50th, whom I had known well before the war. Mj.-Gen. Petrov was born in the village of Zalustyuzhye, near Petersburg, in 1898. His father was a stove-maker in the old capital. Mikhail Petrov was an apprentice with his father at first, and later a fitter at the Petersburg cartridge works. During the Revolution he volunteered to the Red Army and participated in the Civil War.

After the Civil War, Mikhail Petrov attended the Infantry School in Tambov and the Transcaucasian Political School from 1923 to 1925. In 1932 he attended a training course for tank officers in Leningrad and subsequently commanded the training battalion of the 1st Mechanised Brigade. In 1936 and 1937 Petrov fought in Spain as a volunteer against the Franco rebels and the German and Italian fascists who supported them. He was conferred the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for his meritorious service and bravery.

Mj.-Gen. Petrov was in the thick of the fighting from the day the nazis attacked the Soviet Union, first as commander of a mechanised corps and later as Commander of the 50th Army. His fearless conduct and unquenchable will-power infected all his subordinates.

His son, Major A. Petrov, an engineer, told me about the last days of the courageous Army Commander. Young Petrov visited the place where his father died and obtained some of the details.

Mikhail Petrov was wounded in the upper section of both legs in the fighting on the Resset River. He could not move and was unconscious most of the time from loss of blood. Army Headquarters had still a long way to go,

fighting all the time. It was impossible to transport the seriously wounded General. So General Petrov was abandoned in a remote village in the care of a doctor and nurse. It was hoped that later, even if the territory would not soon be liberated, Petrov would on recovering return home with the help of the partisans. A group of soldiers, the doctor and nurse brought the wounded General to a small forest village, Golyinka, in Karachev District. The nazis, they knew, had sidestepped the remote village. The wounded man was left in the house of a collective-farm family, the Novokreshchyonovs. The soldiers went back to their units, while the doctor and nurse remained. Gangrene set in. Petrov ordered the nurse to go away, apparently in order to contact partisans, because she was a native of the area. About a week or ten days later, a nazi squad raided the village. The doctor hid in the forest. There was no time to conceal the wounded General, and he stayed with the Novokreshchyonovs. The nazis came to the house. The mistress of the house covered the General with an old sheepskin and told the enemy that he was her husband who had gone to the forest and was wounded by a mine. Nobody in the village had seen the General and the nazis went away after pillaging the village.

A short time later, the doctor brought to the house a group of stray soldiers making their way eastward. They built a comfortable stretcher and took the General to an abandoned hut in the forest seven kilometres from the village. The forester and a few people hiding from the enemy had already found shelter in the hut. The nazis had not yet been there. Petrov was put up in a separate room, and the relative sense of safety enabled the doctor to improve treatment. But the gangrene got worse. The men decided to take him to Karachev, where they knew a few loyal people among the district doctors, because an operation was essential. Preparations were begun for this complicated journey. Petrov did not approve of it. His condition deteriorated rapidly. After about 10 days in the forest hut, the General died. He was buried at night, in mid-November 1941.

Several dozen peasants of neighbouring villages and workers from Karachev came to the funeral. The doctor identified the deceased in his brief speech as Commander

Petrov, Hero of the Soviet Union (but did not say what troops the deceased had commanded).

In 1956 the grave was shown to Petrov's son. The remains were exhumed and brought to Bryansk. Thousands walked in the procession to the city cemetery, where public ceremonies are held on anniversaries of the city's liberation from the nazis.

To sum up, all the armies of the Bryansk Front broke out of the operational nazi encirclement in an organised and orderly manner, maintaining a high degree of discipline. To do so they had had to cope with strong enemy rearward pressure and crash through a series of enemy defence lines. Yet they had enough strength after the ordeal to erect a new front of defence. This was due essentially to the timely reversal of their front 180° and the clear and specific missions assigned to them. (After I was wounded, control over the Bryansk Front was assumed by the Supreme Command itself.)

The resistance of the Bryansk Front, which drew off the main strength of the 2nd Panzer Army and part of the 2nd Field Army, the hard-fought battles during its retirement to new lines checked the enemy offensive on Tula for 17 days. The Bryansk Front troops administered a painful belting to the nazi shock groups aimed at Moscow in October and November from the south-west through Bryansk, Orel and Tula.

On October 4, 1941, fascist propaganda celebrated prematurely what it described as the total annihilation of the Bryansk Front armies. We could have overlooked this now, but for some of the present-day writers who want to out-Goebbels Goebbels. Guderian and many Western historians have seized on the fib broadcast by the German General Staff in 1941 about the rout of the Bryansk Front.

Guderian, for example, claims in his memoirs that Russian troops surrounded north of Bryansk surrendered to the nazis on October 17 and that the nazis took 50,000 prisoners and destroyed the bulk of the 50th Army.

Yet in later passages, Guderian's lie explodes in his face when he says that "dangerously fresh enemy forces, the Russian 50th Army consisting of the 108th Tank Brigade

[it was the 108th Tank Division. -A.E.], the 299th Infantry Division, the 31st Cavalry Division and other units, appeared on November 21 in the line of action of our 47th Panzer Corps [in the Yepifan area. -A.E.]".*

How could an army whose main strength (50,000) had surrendered on October 17 represent "a dangerously fresh force" consisting of the same divisions, only a month later?

The fact is that the 50th Army was battleworthy when it came out of the pocket and received some insignificant reinforcements in November in order to engage the enemy 47th Panzer Corps on November 21. It was, indeed, the very same 50th Army that had according to Guderian's claim "surrendered" in October.

The 50th Army was back in action as part of the force defending Tula on November 7. The divisions that Guderian claimed to have been wiped out, took part in the counter-offensive of November 21. The 3rd Army, which the nazis also imagined crushed, fought shoulder to shoulder with the 50th.

As a matter of fact, the 50th Army fought savage rear-guard actions in the Belev and Mtsensk area as far back as October 25, and was simultaneously fortifying its new line of defence along the Oka River.

All the same our situation at that time was nothing short of lamentable. The fate of Moscow, the Soviet capital, hung on a thread. The enemy had managed to encircle the three Fronts defending the capital. The reserves we had were insufficient. Besides, they were still en route from the east. The Western and Reserve Fronts were in a desperate position. Most people who knew the situation at the approaches to Moscow, considered it more dangerous than it was in June and early July, at the time of the tensest fighting.

The troops of the Bryansk Front, too, were having it hard. They were outflanked and surrounded by a large enemy force. Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army alone, which enveloped our left wing, was hammering our rear with five panzer, four motorised, and four infantry divisions and a motorised brigade. In the meantime, the nazi 43rd Army

Corps and two divisions of the 53rd Army Corps outflanked the right wing of the 50th Army. All this enemy strength outnumbered the Bryansk Front troops more than 2 to 1 in personnel and about 10 to 1 in tanks. Our divisions were depleted even before our September offensive. After the offensive, they were still weaker. This gave the enemy a tremendous edge. But Guderian and von Bock, Commander of Army Group Centre, did not take advantage of their numerical superiority and superior equipment against the Bryansk Front, which was cut off from its bases and deprived of normal supply.

Small wonder that Guderian returns to the matter several times in his book, because he cannot make ends meet. Take his claims about the Russians surrendering in two pockets at Bryansk. "On October 9, the Russians followed up their attempts to break out at Suzemki," Guderian writes. "The Russians assaulted the right flank, that is, our 293rd Infantry Division, and pressed it back to Suzemki and Shalenka. The 25th Motorised Division, which was part of the Panzer Army's reserve, had not yet arrived and we were compelled to fill the breach between the 29th Motorised Division and the 293rd Infantry Division with the 41st Motorised Regiment of the 10th Motorised Division. The 48th Panzer Corps, which was to have advanced on Kursk and Livny on the orders of the Army Group Centre Command, was now shunted to Sevsk in full strength. The Commander of the 25th Motorised Division, General Glaesner, came to Sevsk at noon and assumed command of all units fighting in the sector between the 29th Motorised Division and the 293rd Infantry Division. While bitter fighting proceeded in that sector, the main force of the 1st Cavalry Division encountered little resistance in crossing the Sudost River, and struck out for Trubchevsk. The opponent had confused the division, and it was now eager to make up for lost time. In the last few days, the enemy continued to exert pressure chiefly in the direction of Trubchevsk-Sevsk, Trubchevsk-Orel and Trubchevsk-Karachev."

Guderian goes on to say that "on October 11, the Russian troops persisted in their attempt to break out of the Trubchevsk kettle, advancing along both banks of the

Navlya and swarming into the gap that appeared between the 29th and 25th motorised divisions".

Elsewhere he says: "On October 13 the Russians kept on trying to crash through between Navlya and Borshchevo. We had to send some units of the 3rd Panzer Division and 10th Motorised Division, both of the 24th Panzer Corps, to reinforce the 47th Panzer Corps. Despite this help and due to loss of mobility, a Russian group of up to 5,000 men succeeded in breaking out."*

This dressed-up account shows the enemy's faulty judgement and reveals how alarmed Guderian was by the Bryansk Front operation. The nazis were unable, however hard they tried, to build up enough strength and prevent our breaking out of the pocket. Our troops, on the other hand, built up their blow rapidly, crushed nazi reinforcements piecemeal as they approached and advanced to new lines. After all these battles the highly touted Guderian panzer army lost some of its bite.

"The material superiority our panzer forces had heretofore was lost. From now on, it belonged to the enemy. The outlook of rapid and continuous success faded."**

Guderian could not have been more explicit in describing the effects of our resistance. He lost confidence in the victory he had been so sure of before. His subordinates, too, were shaken. In describing the mood of Colonel Eberbach, who was one of his best commanders, Guderian wrote:

"For the first time in this arduous campaign, Eberbach looked worn. It was not physical exhaustion, but spiritual shock. The fact that the latest battle made so strong an impression on our best officers was disconcerting."***

Many nazis, Guderian among them, were depressed. The blitzkrieg idea, which had impelled Guderian and his like, had obviously misfired.

It is more than 20 years since the gunfire at Bryansk subsided and, once more, I should like to pay tribute to all the men and officers of the Bryansk Front for their matchless exploit. The peoples of the Soviet Union will for

* Guderian, op. cit., S. 214, 215, 217.

** Ibid., op. cit., S. 215.

*** Ibid., S. 213.

ever cherish their memory. The following lines in the comprehensive Soviet war history pay due homage to them:

"For three weeks the divisions of the Bryansk Front fought fierce actions in the enemy's rear. By their heroic operations they pinned down the main strength of the 2nd Field and 2nd Panzer Armies, and thereby frustrated nazi plans of outflanking the troops of the Western Front from the south."*

* *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soyuza. 1941-1945*, Vol. 2, p. 250.

CHAPTER NINE

BACK IN ACTION

My stay at the hospital was coming to an end. On December 23, 1941, I reported to Supreme Headquarters that I was able to resume my duties.

On December 24, I was received by the Supreme Commander. Stalin asked me a completely unexpected question:

"Tell me, Comrade Eremenko, are you easily offended?"

"I wouldn't say so."

"Do you happen to know Sklyansky?"*

"Yes."

"Well, when I was People's Commissar," Stalin said, "I was Sklyansky's subordinate for a time, though he was Deputy People's Commissar. Will you be offended if, for a time, we put you under comrades who were recently your own subordinates?"

Stalin explained that an extremely important mission was contemplated and that he considered me the most suitable man for it.

A powerful shock army was being activated, Stalin said, to breach the enemy front in depth and drive a wedge in between nazi troops operating in the strategic Moscow and Leningrad sectors. I would be appointed commander of this army (the 4th Shock Army), which was part of the North-Western Front under Pavel Kurochkin, only recently my subordinate in the Western Front Command.

* Sklyansky, Yefraim Markovich (1892-1925), Deputy People's Commissar for the Navy and Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the U.S.S.R. from September 1918 to 1924. In 1925, while on official business in the United States, he drowned when bathing.



A. I. Eremenko and M. V. Rudakov receive a delegation of workers

I said I was ready to assume any post the Party thought fit for me if it was of benefit to my country.

Stalin wished me success and suggested that I call on Boris Shaposhnikov, who would acquaint me in greater detail with the impending mission and discuss the organisational side.

Ten or fifteen minutes later I arrived at General Staff and learned exhaustively about the concentration of 4th Shock Army troops, which had already begun, and looked into the principal tasks assigned to it.

Mj.-Gen. Vladimir Kurasov, whose nomination was discussed with me by the Supreme Commander, was appointed Chief of Staff, and Divisional Commissar Mikhail Rudakov, who was already on the spot, was Member of the 4th Shock Army Military Council.

Before proceeding with the story of the 4th Shock Army I want to recount in brief the changes which occurred in the Western sector while I was hospitalised.

In the course of their October offensive the nazis had advanced about 230-250 kilometres in the main (Moscow)

direction. But their plan of crashing through to the Soviet capital, let alone capturing it, was frustrated.

Enemy strength was greatly reduced by the succession of stiff and bloody battles. Army Group Centre lost the advantages it had over us, the defenders. The nazi command was compelled to call a fortnight's pause in order to prime for a new assault.

Despite heavy nazi losses in the October offensive, the enemy was still numerically superior, but undertook the fresh offensive without massive reserves, because he thought we had none either.

Bitter fighting broke out on November 15 in the Klin-Solnechnogorsk and Stalinogorsk-Kashira areas. The nazis made some progress, but did not breach our front and a counter-drive by our 1st Shock Army, of the Supreme Command Reserve, flung them back in the Yakhroma area.

The final enemy attempt to scramble into Moscow in early December from the Narofominsk area ended in dismal failure. Our troops managed to close a breach where the enemy had begun swarming through, and drove the nazis back to their initial positions.

By December 5 the tide had turned. Having failed to achieve a decisive success at any of the break-through points, the enemy was compelled to admit that his offensive potential was exhausted. He assumed the defensive.

The Soviet troops displayed matchless heroism and tenacity in the defensive battles, delivering Moscow from mortal danger. The civilian population of Moscow and Moscow Region played an eminent part in defending the city. The credit for the deliverance of the capital goes to the whole nation, which spared no effort in securing victory over our enemy.*

In the meantime, our southern forces mounted a major counter-offensive between November 17 and December 2. They relieved Rostov-on-Don and pinned down Army Group South, denying the nazi command the opportunity of shifting its troops from the south to the Central sector. This contributed greatly to stabilising the situation in the centre.

Savage engagements were also fought in the north-

* On the 20th anniversary of the victory over Hitler Germany the city of Moscow was conferred the title of Hero City.

western sector through October and November. The enemy strove might and main to capture Leningrad and make contact on land with the Finnish armies. The Soviet Command, for its part, planned a counter-offensive to break the Leningrad blockade. However, the enemy touched off his attack earlier. Fighting every inch of the way, the nazis advanced 120 km and captured Tikhvin. Leningrad's position deteriorated. True, the enemy was driven back from the Volkhov-Tikhvin railway. The perseverance and bravery of our troops yielded fruit. The enemy suffered heavy losses. His troops were fatigued by the ceaseless fighting in severe forest and marshy terrain. Hitler's assault force was stretched thin along a 300-kilometre front.

In December our troops (those of the Leningrad and, later, the newly established Volkhov Fronts) recaptured Tikhvin after a series of savage battles and inflicted painful casualties on the enemy, pressing him back to Lodva and Kirishi and farther across the Volkhov River to Novgorod, and capturing a bridgehead on the right bank of the Volkhov.

The scheme of isolating Leningrad and throttling it with hunger fell through. It may be in order here to recall the claim of the reactionary West German historian Gerlitz that Hitler did not want to capture Leningrad, because he was reluctant to waste food supplies on the population of that vast city. One would think from what Gerlitz says that the nazis supplied food to the populations of the cities they captured. One would think, too, that capturing cities depended purely on the Führer's wishes.

An objective examination of the summer and autumn campaign of 1941 will clearly reveal the reasons why the nazi drive petered out. For all this, the veterans of the march on Moscow have invented a variety of versions to explain why they suffered so unexpected and ignominious a failure in executing their carefully engineered plan of capturing our capital.

The most widespread of these versions refers to the severe Russian climate in general, and to the cold that prevailed in October-November 1941, in particular. The severe weather did, no doubt, affect warfare. But it equally afflicted our own troops, and those of the enemy. Fighting a war in a cold winter is a hard proposition. But that is

not the main thing. The reasons for the nazi defeat in the winter of 1941-42 lie in our tenacious defence and our audacious counter-offensives.

The counter-offensive at Moscow, for one, was built up by the whole Soviet people under Communist Party leadership in the most difficult of conditions created by the loss of immense territories with highly developed industries and farms. By December 1941 the Party had succeeded in boosting the production of war materials and in activating troop reserves.

This is what the situation looked like in the Western sector of the front by December:

Army Group Centre, consisting of 74 divisions, of which 22 were panzer and motorised divisions, assumed the defensive along a front of more than 1,000 kilometres. Both the wings of this principal Wehrmacht force on the Eastern Front were enveloped by Soviet troops. Our Kalinin Front hugged it from the north and the adjoining divisions of the Western and South-Western Fronts invested its flank and rear in the south. By that time our Supreme Command had marshalled fresh reserve armies.

The plan of our counter-offensive was simple. The troops of the Western Front were to thrust at Klin, Solnechnogorsk and Istra and crush the main nazi assault force on the right wing. A simultaneous strike at Uzlovaya and Bogoroditsk was to disable the left-flank forces, that is, Guderian's panzer army. The Kalinin Front was to assist the Western Front in this undertaking. The right wing of the South-Western Front was to bear down on the Yeletsk-Livny enemy group, emerge in the rear of Guderian's panzer army, and support the Western Front operation. Our strength in the Western sector had increased, but the enemy still had superior strength.

The Kalinin Front was the first to jump off in the morning of December 5. The Western and South-Western Fronts started the following day. Bitter and bloody fighting began. Hitler complained about the winter's frost and issued an order for all nazi troops to assume the defensive. Yet he also intended to carry through a series of local, though fairly large, offensive operations.

The Western Front relieved Solnechnogorsk on December 12. On December 15 its troops freed Klin, and the

enemy line along the Istra reservoir was breached on the same day. Our troops gained an opportunity to advance on Volokolamsk. Enemy defences south-west of Zvenigorod were battered down. The spearhead of our offensive was aimed north-westward into the rear of enemy troops west of Istra and Zvenigorod.

This made the position of the northern nazi shock force untenable. It faced imminent encirclement and began a hasty withdrawal. Mobile cavalry and tank forces took up the pursuit. In the last ten days of December the Western Front troops reached the Ruza and Lama rivers, where their drive was stemmed by fiercely resisting enemy forces. In the ensuing battles the 3rd and 4th Panzer Groups suffered serious losses.

The counter-offensive of the Kalinin Front was no less successful. After ten days of bloody fighting our troops recaptured the city of Kalinin. The badly battered nazi 9th Field Army retired hastily.

By December 25 the Kalinin Front troops were temporarily halted along a line running from Vysokoye through Kaznakovo to Lotoshino. However, they crashed through the defences of the 9th Field Army and captured Staritsa on January 1, 1942. The enemy feared that we would break into the Central sector of his defences and retired along a wide frontage to previously prepared fortifications along the Volga, through Pogoreloye Gorodishche and Lotoshino, while clinging to staging areas near Rzhev and Selizharov.

The recapture of Kalinin by the Kalinin Front was doubly welcome, because it restored direct connections between the three Fronts—the Western, Kalinin and North-Western—enabling them to co-operate more closely.

While the Soviet counter-offensive gained impetus north of Moscow, the left wing of the Western Front did substantial damage to the main forces of the 2nd Panzer Army, forcing it to backtrack 130 km and reducing the threat of a nazi drive on Moscow from the south. In the meanwhile, the right wing of the South-Western Front also mounted an offensive, which culminated in the recapture of Yelets. This gave us an opportunity to strike at Orel in the latter half of December 1941. In early January 1942,

the left wing of the Western Front fought savage engagements to liberate Podolsk, Kaluga and Belev.

In the Central sector of the Front, our troops dislodged the enemy from Narofominsk, Maloyaroslavets and Borovsk.

The Bryansk Front, too, advanced somewhat after heavy fighting. All in all, our troops in the sector adjoining the flanks of the Western and South-Western Fronts swarmed forward 250 kilometres against stiff enemy resistance, investing Army Group Centre from the south. Troops of the Kalinin Front and the right wing of the Western Front, meanwhile, invested Army Group Centre from the north.

This was the general picture at the time I received my new appointment. The Red Army had consummated its Moscow counter-offensive and inflicted telling defeats on the nazis at Tikhvin and Rostov-on-Don.

The Supreme Command was prompted by these developments to take an optimistic view of things and concluded that it would soon crush the enemy in all the three strategic sectors of the Soviet-German front. A crushing blow was planned in the south against the enemy lodged in the Donets Basin and the Crimea. In the north west, an operation was contemplated to defeat Army Group North and relieve Leningrad. But the biggest assignment of all was contemplated in the central sector, where the Kalinin, Western and Bryansk Fronts, supported by the adjoining wing of the North-Western Front, were to encircle Army Group Centre.

It was up to the 4th Shock Army in concert with two other armies of the North-Western Front to deliver a deep blow in order to close the ring round the enemy in the north west.

Later developments showed that Stalin's scheme was premature: we had not enough strength and equipment to cope with so immense an undertaking.

On December 25, 1941, Kurasov and I drove in our staff cars from Moscow to the Headquarters of the North-Western Front, on the left wing of which the 4th Shock Army was being concentrated.

The 4th Shock Army had the 27th Army for its nucleus and was reinforced by divisions from the Supreme

Command's Reserve. The 27th Army had begun the war in Riga under Lt.-Gen. Nikolai Berzarin. It fought savage delaying actions there as it withdrew, making the most of the forests and the marshland in the north-west of the country. At Rezekne, Novorzhev, Opochna and Kholm, and at other points too, it thrust back at the enemy, inflicting heavy losses in ferocious defensive battles. But it was not until it reached the line along Lake Seliger to Ostashkov that it managed to dig in and stand firm.

According to the reconnaissance troop of North-Western Front Headquarters, the enemy facing the 27th Army occupied defences along the western shore of Lake Seliger and southward. At this point the front line twisted east. The forward positions of the enemy followed the southern shore of Lake Volgo. The right wing of the 27th was faced by the nazi 123rd Infantry Division and the reconnaissance troop of the nazi 12th Infantry Division. The division was stretched thinly along a front of considerable length and all its troops were in the first echelon. The left flank of the 27th was faced by the 253rd Infantry Division and the attached reconnaissance troop of the 251st Infantry Division. All these divisions were part of two German Armies, the 16th and 9th. Their junction, between lakes Peno and Volgo, was covered by the SS Totenkopf Cavalry Brigade.

The line of the Front was somewhat unusual. At Lake Peno our defences bulged far into the enemy dispositions. This created a kind of "mousetrap" for our troops in the event of a nazi offensive, for the enemy would have a good chance of mounting flanking counter-attacks. It presented very real danger, but we ignored it, because we believed that our sudden action would prevent the enemy from rushing in reserves, firstly, due to bad roads (the enemy had no ski battalions) and, secondly, because nazi reserves were committed to fighting off our frontal attacks; and thirdly, our coverage of the flanks of the main thrust on Peno and Andreapol would deny such flanking nazi counter-attacks.

The terrain made manoeuvring difficult. Forests and marshes and numerous lakes lay all round. Besides, there were many rivers. Huge forests, occupying some 85 per cent of the area, sprawled in the northern and central



G. F. Tarasov

parts of our staging area. The territory round the river sources had been a reserve and timbering had been prohibited. There were no cuttings at all, and troop movements were greatly impeded. It will be recalled, too, that the operation dates to the winter of 1941-42 which was unusually severe. The temperature was 30°C below zero. The snow lay 70 cm to 1.5 metres deep.

The army was plagued by logistics difficulties. The lack of roads gave us many headaches. The only railway in the area, which could handle no more than 16 pairs of trains a day, terminated 40 km from Ostashkov, having been demolished by the enemy from Gorovastitsy onward. The dirt road, also the only one in the area, was in a bad state of neglect. The lack of roads made offensive action doubly complicated.

At first, the 4th Shock Army had eight infantry divisions, three infantry brigades, four artillery support regiments, three tank battalions, a few Guard mortar battalions and ten ski battalions.

The troop build-up was covered by the 249th Infantry Division, which was conducting active reconnaissance. The units of the 249th had been border troops before the war

and constituted a dependable fighting force. Their personnel was well trained and had subsequent combat experience in the early frontier battles. The 249th was under the command of an experienced frontier-guard, Colonel (later Major-General) Herman Tarasov.

On reaching the 4th Shock Army I ordered the 249th Division to organise active reconnaissance with the purpose of capturing prisoners at all points involved in the forthcoming operation. The division made an excellent job of its assignment, and Army HQ had fairly exhaustive information five days later about enemy defences and strength. We found out there was no second enemy defence line.

Troop concentration took 7-10 days longer than we planned, and was completed as late as January 7. Some units arrived after the offensive had begun. The delay was due chiefly to the cold, which alternated with heavy snowfall, hampering normal automobile traffic. Besides, the railway from Moscow to Ostashkov could not cope with the stepped-up flow, and no more than eleven trains passed each day. We were compelled to postpone the offensive, which we had originally planned for January 1, first to January 5 and then to January 7. But it was not until January 9 that we really got moving.

When preparing the operation, we laid special stress on troop training. The moment the units arrived, they began tactical exercises, gaining proficiency chiefly in attack, forest movements, employment of tanks, artillery and mortars in forestland, logistics and supply in the specific conditions. For three or four successive days the divisions did not enter villages or towns, to make the personnel accustomed to living in the forest in the winter's cold. Staff officers held classes on combat organisation with all officers down to the battalion commanders of every division. Besides, divisional staffs held briefings, at which they were taught to handle matters they would have to cope with in the coming operation.

We had to stockpile food at points close to the scene of the coming action. This was most important. However, Front HQ, far from helping us in the matter, "relieved us" of the food we had stocked up with so much trouble. The Front ordered us to supply our right neighbour, the

3rd Shock Army, which had almost no supplies of its own, and this exhausted our stock. In a matter of ten days we had no supplies left.

Despite supply difficulties, the troops primed enthusiastically for the offensive. The enemy, who had had more than three months to build up defences, erected a number of defence localities with well-organised systems of fire. Yet we knew that the dense forestland would enable us to sideslip these centres, to encircle them and contain them with slender forces, while the bulk of our troops would develop an offensive in depth.

In the area of our offensive, the enemy had some three infantry divisions supported by 50 to 60 planes and, subsequently, in depth, by 200-300 planes.

Our plan was as follows:

Two divisions would make the main attack towards Peno, Andreapol and Toropets with another division on each of the flanks. One division and two brigades would follow the main force in the second echelon, one of the brigades drawing off the enemy in the Drozdovo-Davydovo area during the break-through and the other covering the Army's left flank from the Selizharovo group. All in all, four divisions would operate in the first echelon, and one division and two brigades in the second.

Regrettably, our plan was scrapped. The Front Command refused to endorse it and ordered us to build up strength on our right flank. It wanted us to make two attacks instead of one: on the Army's right flank and in the centre. This tended to disperse our strength. I insisted on one attack in the centre at the limiting point between two enemy divisions, fearing that the offensive on the right flank would yield no success. As later developments showed, my fears were well founded.

The Commander of the North-Western Front, however, insisted on strengthening the Army's right flank and mounting a second attack there, because he was eager to shore up the 3rd Shock Army, which was to strike out in the general direction of Velikiye Luki. For this reason, the composition of the 4th Shock Army, as earlier defined by the General Staff and Supreme Command, was altered. Three of its infantry divisions, all of them combat-

experienced veterans, two artillery regiments and a tank battalion were shifted to the 3rd Shock Army.

This weakened the 4th considerably.

It is safe to say that if the 4th Shock Army had not been depleted and had received the promised reserves, the outcome of the operation would have been more favourable. Not only would we have recaptured Vitebsk, Rudnya and Liosno, but our neighbours, too, would have had more freedom to advance farther than they did. Possibly, Smolensk would also have been recaptured.

The final plan of our operation, after the Front Command endorsed it, provided for strong thrusts in two directions. Mj.-Gen. Ivan Kuznetsov's 360th Division was to mount an attack in the first echelon on the right flank, supported by a ski battalion, a tank battalion and two battalions of engineers. Kuznetsov's thrust was directed at Bolshaya Antonovshchina, Glazuny and Zalesye. An infantry brigade was to follow it in the second echelon. On reaching Glazuny, the 360th was to turn south-west along the western shore of Lake Vselug and envelop the enemy's 416th Infantry Regiment. Another infantry brigade reinforced by two ski battalions would effect the junction between the right flank and the centre of the Army. This brigade would advance on Karpovshchina.

A second and stronger assault was to be delivered in the centre. Three divisions were marshalled for it in the first echelon, and an infantry brigade in the second.

The main effort against Peno was to be made by Col. Tarasov's 249th Infantry Division supported by two ski battalions, a battalion of "Katyusha" jet rockets, a tank battalion and a battalion of engineers. The 332nd Frunze Infantry Division, formed in Ivanovo and consisting of local workers and peasants, was its closest neighbour. Reinforced by a ski battalion and a company of engineers it would advance towards Lokhovo-Zhukopa Station.

The two divisions were to co-operate closely with the 334th Infantry Division somewhat to the left of them under Col. Nikolai Mishchenko.

The junction with the neighbouring 22nd Army was to be covered by the 21st Infantry Brigade, following in the second echelon to the left of the 334th Division.

All in all, four divisions, one brigade, six ski and two

tank battalions formed the first echelon, and two brigades formed the second. One division, one brigade and one ski battalion, dispositioned in the centre, were kept in reserve.

The Army artillery was apportioned as follows: five battalions were attached to the sector of the 249th Infantry Division, making the main effort, the 322nd had one battalion and the 334th two battalions of artillery. Besides covering the main attack from the enemy group at Selizharovo, we also had to afford reliable protection to the Army's left flank.

The operation was planned in two stages. In the first stage we were to breach enemy defences and crush the main enemy force, consisting of the 416th Infantry Regiment, units of the SS Totenkopf Cavalry Brigade and the 253rd Infantry Division. This would bring us to the western shore of Lake Vselug at Soblago Station and Selizharovo.

The units would jump off to the attack at different times—some of them in the evening of January 8, others in the night of January 8-9, and the rest at 10 a.m. on January 9. Two hours of preparation fire was planned in the main sectors, and air preparation by a slender force of Lagg-3 fighters was envisaged chiefly for its moral effect.

The staggered attack schedule was designed to confuse the enemy about our operational objective. The ruse succeeded, and we crashed the enemy defence line in a relatively short time with small losses.

The first stage of the operation was planned to last two days.

The second stage was centred on vigorous pursuit of the retreating enemy in order to prevent him from reaching a rearward line, and on the capture of Andreapol. One division, four infantry brigades and six ski battalions were assigned to perform this mission. The Army's long-range artillery groups were to be shifted to the infantry divisions in this second stage, while the 39th Infantry Brigade under Col. Victor Poznyak, whose original mission was to connect the assault groups on the Army's right flank and the centre, was to become part of the Army's reserve after the nazi front was breached.

Our neighbour on the right, the 3rd Shock Army, was to advance towards Trestino, destroy the enemy there and

reach Novaya Russa Ivanovskoye towards the close of the fourth day. Later, it was to develop its offensive towards Velila and Mukhino, while covering its right wing.

Regrouping and preparation began well in advance. The 219th Infantry Division covered concentration and deployment, and conducted reconnaissance.

Concentrating troops was anything but easy. We did not want to overburden the only railway we had with operational troop trains and had the bulk of the troops (the 332nd, 334th, 358th and 360th infantry divisions) driven from Moscow in lorries along the Torzhok-Kuyshinovo Ostashkov road. One infantry brigade and the artillery and tank units were brought in by train. As for the ski battalions, they came to the assembly area on skis.

To improve our initial positions for the big offensive, the 249th Infantry Division mounted several attacks and captured Zarechye, Zaborye and a few other points. This secured more favourable start lines for our right flank divisions.

Our troops came to their assault positions at night, on January 6-7. Not until then did the 219th, which had covered our build up, assemble its units in the designated attack area. All precautions were taken not to betray our movements to the enemy.

Covering the build up with just one division until the very beginning of the offensive proved successful in the circumstances. The enemy did not discover the presence of our group. Nor did he have any inkling of the contemplated offensive and the direction of our main effort. This secured for us the surprise element.

On January 6 the order for the offensive was announced to the troops. According to this order the first of the two main attacks would be made at Bolshaya Antonovshchina, Glazuny and Naumovo with the specific purpose of annihilating the enemy in and around Drozdovo, Zhukovo, Lopatino and Daydovo. The second attack would be aimed at Koshelevo Peno with the object of wiping out the enemy in and around Ramenye, Kolobovo and Bor.

We had had to accede to the wishes of our Front Command and treat both attacks as main attacks. In point of fact, however, the attack on the right flank was no more than auxiliary, both as regards strength and my idea of

it. It was the 249th and 332nd infantry divisions that would really deliver the main blow with the support of the bulk of our artillery.

We requested the Front Command to bring up two divisions from its reserve to the attack area for a subsequent assault on Okhvat Station in a southerly direction towards Nelidovo, so we would not be distracted from our immediate mission by having to assist the progress of the 22nd Army on our left. But our request was turned down. As a result, we had had to assign part of our strength during the operation to capture Nelidovo, secure our left flank and assist the 22nd Army.

On January 8, I assembled my top commanders and explained our plan to them once again. I wanted to know how each of them understood his particular mission and the general mission of the 4th Shock Army. To make sure, I set out to the commanders their specific missions once again.

Naturally, we were most concerned about ensuring the success of the 249th and 332nd divisions, which were making the main attack.

The preparation fire, which was to begin at 8.30 a.m. on January 9 was to subdue nazi strongpoints, the system of fire and enemy artillery.

The air arm was instructed to cover the actions of our central and right-flank groups. A ten-minute raid was to suppress the nazi support points and prevent flanking counter-attacks. The other job entrusted to our air arm was to prevent the enemy from rushing in reserves from Andreapol or attempting a withdrawal beyond lakes Vselug and Peno.

Our air arm consisted of 60 planes, of which 53 were battleworthy, including 16 Lagg-3, 17 I-15b, 2 SB and 18 Po-2 planes.

Our Political Department did a lot of painstaking work to prime the personnel for the coming offensive, for the conditions were extremely severe. The Military Council supervised political orientation among the troops. The job was sparked effectively by Divisional Commissar Rudakov, our Army's Member of the Military Council.

Party and Komsomol organisations were formed in all our sub-units. They elected Party organisers, Komsomol

organisers and their deputies. The political bodies saw to it that every unit had an agitator. They also trained reconnaissance troops.

At night on January 8-9 the troops were to move up to their initial attack positions. The 360th, 249th, 332nd and 334th infantry divisions and the 39th Infantry Brigade came to their respective startlines on schedule. The rest of the divisions and some of the attached units were late for various reasons, above all due to their late arrival to the build-up area and the lack of roads, the snowdrifts, shortages of forage and fuel and, last but not least, fatigue of men and horses.

As a result, the Army began its offensive operation while one division (the 358th) and three brigades (the 21st, 48th and 51st) were not yet fully assembled. One tank battalion, a mortar battalion (the 294th) and five ski battalions had not arrived at all.

Parts of many of our units had not come either. All these delays were due entirely to the very severe conditions and shortages of fuel and food.

It turned out that the Army was unprepared for the operation from the logistical point of view. Troops and stores had no more than 2.5 rations of ammunition per man and as little as 1-1.5 rations of food and forage. There was no gasoline stored at all, and the vehicles had an average of about 0.15 ration in their tanks.

The Army began its offensive undermanned. We were short of about 1,000 officers and as many as 20,000 privates and non-coms. To make matters worse, we lacked at least 2,000 horses.

All the same, the basic conditions for success were on hand: we did have the essentials as far as supplies were concerned, and that was something; the morale of the troops ran very high; our plan of operation was essentially effective and all concerned were properly briefed and oriented.

CHAPTER TEN

THE OFFENSIVE

Our guns opened up imperiously at dawn on January 9. I was at the Army CP beside a little village called Soroga, keeping close touch with the troops.

At 10.30 a.m., after the two-hour artillery preparation, our central group—the 249th and 332nd infantry divisions—swarmed forward through waist-deep snow, subduing fierce enemy resistance.

The bulk of the 249th advanced on Peno in an effort to outflank it. By evening, the 925th Infantry Regiment approached the outskirts of Peno from the north, while two battalions of the 917th Regiment penetrated into the town's eastern outskirts. However, due to strong enemy fire and desperate counter-attacks the battalions were withdrawn. We brought up the guns, which had dropped behind in the snowdrifts, and bombarded the nazis. Our crack rocket artillery unit joined in. At dawn on January 10 the 925th assaulted the town again from the north and the 917th from the east. By mid-day the 67th Ski Battalion reached the town's southern outskirts.

All routes of escape were thus sealed. A simultaneous onslaught from three sides crushed enemy resistance, and at 1.00 p.m. Peno was recaptured. On the heels of the badly-battered nazi cavalry regiment and reconnaissance troop (of the SS Totenkopf Division's cavalry brigade) the 925th Infantry Regiment broke into Sheverevo, the 917th into Soblago and the 67th Ski Battalion into Lauga. The well-timed and co-ordinated thrust on Peno almost entirely annihilated the local nazi force.

A nazi battalion commander who surrendered on January 20 said that the remnants of the SS reconnaissance

battalion retreating from Peno made a disheartening impression on his soldiers. "None of us had ever imagined," he said, "that a German military unit could flee in such panic. Yet two days later, we were fleeing ourselves."

The 921st Infantry Regiment of the 249th Division, which operated from the north, smashed the reconnaissance troop of the nazi 123rd Infantry Division in the Perekhodovets-Zayevo area. Part of the 921st covered the division's right flank, while the main force continued the advance toward Zarechye. In the evening of January 10 the 921st captured Zarechye and carried on in stride towards Bervenets. This made the division's right flank entirely safe. What was more, it created a threat of total encirclement for the enemy's 416th Infantry Regiment and facilitated the advance of our Army's right flank.

After two days of fighting we had thus breached the enemy's defence line in the main sector and captured Peno, an important nazi strongpost between the big lakes and a point of junction between the nazi 16th and 9th Armies. We had advanced 27 kilometres, killed more than 500 enemy soldiers and officers, taken numerous prisoners, captured 12 guns and several ammunition dumps, property and food.

The 332nd Infantry Division, which operated left of the 249th, encountered stubborn enemy resistance on the eastern and south-western shore of Lake Volgo. It could do no more than blockade the enemy in the Lokhov area, while its 1117th Infantry Regiment captured Zhukopa Station towards the close of January 9. Subsequently, the 332nd made the most of the success achieved by its right neighbour (the 249th) and pressed on with its main force towards Krasnoye and Lugi, while some of its detachments stayed behind to cover the enemy's strongposts. The 1115th Infantry Regiment had orders to advance on Golenishchevo. Thereby, it would outflank the enemy force at Luga and straddle routes from Selizharovo to Andreapol.

On the Army's right flank the 360th Infantry Division advanced through literally impassable, roadless forestland. The men felled up to 1,000 trees per kilometre. To make matters worse, the loose snow that lay almost a metre deep, impeded the progress of guns and vehicles.

Due to these difficulties the units of the main column



A gun emplacement

got mixed. The regimental artillery dropped behind, because the fatigued horses were unable to keep pace with the infantry. None but the infantry units moved forward steadily, while attached equipment and guns lagged.

This alone shows how lamentably our offensive would have fared if we had attempted to follow the plan of the North-Western Front Command in every detail, that is, if we delivered the main blow with our right flank. Our forces, assembled with so much difficulty, would have been exhausted in the struggle against the elements and would not have caused the enemy much trouble.

On the Army's left flank, the 334th Infantry Division jumped off at 10.30 a.m., while not yet fully assembled. It engaged the enemy in the Kolobovo-Selishche area, where the nazis had a dense honeycomb of strongpoints and a good system of fire covering all of Lake Volgo. Lack of vigilance by the enemy and poor visibility enabled the 1124th Regiment to cross the ice-locked lake unnoticed and capture Volgo village. However, its attacks around Kolobovo on January 9 and 10 were unsuccessful. Neither did the other regiments of the division achieve the desired results.

Despite the poor progress on the Army's flanks, we decided to press forward along the railway towards Andreapol with our main group. After his defeat at Peno, the enemy hastily assembled the small garrisons in the area to block our main assault force. Also, he rushed in fresh troops from around Andreapol and began organising defences at the approaches to the town around Okhvat Station, Luga and Golenishchevo in an effort to gain time and reinforce the defences of Andreapol before reserves arrived from his rear.

Late in December, when the enemy discovered that we were regrouping our forces in the Staraya Russa sector, he had begun shipping the 81st Infantry Division from France to Staraya Russa. Now, when our troops unexpectedly breached the front at Peno, the enemy shifted the 189th Regiment of that division, then still en route, to an area north-east of Andreapol. Reinforced with a battalion of engineers and a few other separate battalions (security, signals, etc.), this regiment engaged our units at Okhvat Station and Luga, trying to delay our advance until more



Five minutes before 11-hour

nazi reserves arrived. The enemy's desperate efforts to cling to his line along Netesma River were prompted by his hope of covering communication routes to the nazi Selizharovo group, which was menaced by our 1115th Infantry Regiment advancing on Golenishchevo.

On January 13 our 249th Infantry Division crushed the enemy garrison in Okhvat, captured the town and the railway station. However, the nazis were still in possession of the western outskirts of Okhvat and held Velichkovo, Luga and Golenishchevo. We decided to play a bold hand. One regiment of the 249th was left behind in the Okhvat area, while its other units and ski battalions set out through the forest at night towards Andreapol with the object of capturing the town in a surprise assault. In the meantime, the 332nd Infantry Division was ordered to wipe out the nazi 189th Infantry Regiment and its attached battalions at Velichkovo, Luga and Golenishchevo. The 358th Infantry Division of our second echelon sent a regiment to Khodulino and Maltsevo to cover the 332nd Division from the south and assist the advance of the 334th.

Savage fighting ensued around Velichkovo and Luga as we swarmed forward to annihilate the enemy's 189th Regiment (about 3,000 men) and its two attached battalions.

The manoeuvre of the 249th at Andreapol and the simultaneous thrust of the 332nd at Velichkovo and Luga proved successful. The enemy group was wiped out. The fighting at Velichkovo, Luga and Okhvat Station, which began on January 13, ended on January 15. By the evening of January 16 our 1119th and 1117th regiments reached Netesma River.

In the Velichkovo area one of the nazi battalions attempted a "psychic attack". It advanced with ranks serried on the trenches held by some units of the 1117th Regiment. The nazis were allowed to within 80-100 metres of our line. Then our guns opened up, mowing down the enemy to the last man.

Advancing south-westward from Gorovastitsy, the 1115th Infantry Regiment subdued the remnants of the smashed nazi 253rd Infantry Division and reached Golenishchevo on January 15.

The tankers of the 141st Separate Tank Battalion acquitted themselves splendidly. Despite delays during the crossing of the Netesma, they caught up with the infantry and took part in the battle for Okhvat, Velichkovo and Lugi. They were of great help in squashing nazi strongpoints. On January 15 alone, our tanks accounted for 160 enemy soldiers and officers, two guns, six mortars, a few machine guns, etc. They cut off the enemy's routes of retreat, helped us capture enemy property and facilitated our further success.

By wiping out the enemy's 189th Infantry Regiment (the enemy left 1,100 killed on the battlefield) and occupying the area round Lugi and Velichkovo, the 332nd Infantry Division helped the 249th capture Andreapol, for it covered its left flank and prevented enemy reinforcements from entering the town from the south-east and north-east.

The 249th advanced through dense forestland and reached Andreapol from the rear in a matter of 24 hours. At dawn on January 15 it assembled in the environs of the city. After a 20-minute artillery shoot the division mounted its attack on the town simultaneously from west, north and

north-west, while its 141st Tank Battalion supported the onslaught frontally and along the Peno-Andreapol highway. Panic broke out in the city. A rearward attack was the last thing the nazis had expected. for dense and impassable forest lay there.

During January 15 the division totally encircled the enemy in Andreapol. It captured the northern section of the city and its railway station. It also freed the near-by villages of Ramenye, Borok and Rozhenka and gained control of the approaches to the south-western outskirts, blocking nazi escape routes.

When the nazis regained their senses, they rendered desperate resistance. Street fighting ensued. Nazi resistance in the southern section of Andreapol was nothing short of fanatical.

On January 16 at 17.30 hours, after some savage fighting, Andreapol was completely cleared of the enemy. Isolated units of the nazi 253rd Infantry Division, remnants of the 189th Regiment of the 81st Infantry Division and other units were wiped out. Our troops captured depots of food and forage and ammunition and fuel dumps.

To sum up, our main group breached the enemy's front. The first nazi echelon, consisting of an SS Cavalry Brigade, the left-flank regiments of the 253rd Infantry Division and the right-flank units of the 416th Regiment, were annihilated. Enemy reserves in and around Andreapol, Golenishchevo and Velichkovo were also routed. Our Army crashed the enemy's front, captured his local bases and broke up his communications. Our troops began the pursuit. But progress on the flanks, particularly the right flank, slowed disappointingly to a crawl.

Our units on the right flank, as I have said earlier, had to cope with very severe terrain. The 360th Infantry Division encountered the first enemy strongpoint at Glazuny. It was manned by a nazi battalion. As elsewhere, the nazis had turned all buildings into gun emplacements. Due to the inexperience of the divisional and regimental commanders, the division was delayed at Glazuny for all of 24 hours. Instead of sideslipping the enemy, part of the division engaged him in battle despite extremely disadvantageous conditions, and suffered needless losses.

Rudakov and I drove over to the division's HQ, looked

into the matter and straightened things out somewhat. The division detoured Glazuny on the north and advanced towards Naumovo. On January 12 it crossed ice-bound Lake Vselug, subduing and partially wiping out enemy garrisons in villages on the way.

In eight days of fighting the 4th Shock Army almost entirely annihilated the enemy 1st Cavalry Regiment, the reconnaissance troop of an SS cavalry brigade, the 189th Infantry Regiment, a battalion of engineers, and the signals battalion of the 81st Infantry Division. It defeated the 416th Infantry Regiment, the reconnaissance troop of the 123rd, 251st and 253rd infantry divisions, the 453rd Infantry Regiment and units of the 253rd Infantry Division, which the enemy flung desperately into battle to try and slow our offensive.

Exploiting its success, the 4th reached Dmitrovo, Bystri, Rogovo, Sobolevo, Golenishchevo, Maltsevo and Dubrovki. The divisions in the centre overcame enemy resistance to advance 70 km. Numerous prisoners, guns, food stores and various property were captured.

It will be apt to recall here the naive tale of Goebbels's propaganda machine that "winter was the Russians' chief general". The winter created hardships for both sides, but they were a thousand times greater for the attackers. Need I say how much more difficult it is to struggle across roadless terrain, through snowdrifts and dense forests, often with no artillery and no tanks, and to attack enemy positions primed with German thoroughness in the course of several months than it is to hold previously organised positions with well-equipped pill-boxes in and around villages with ample stocks of food, equipment and ammunition.

The excuse that the Russians had greater endurance is self-defeating, for it is a virtual admission of our superior combat potential.

During the fighting for Toropets I stayed with the 249th Division, which was making the main attack, and was wounded. It happened about a kilometre from Ponizovye (on the road to Toropets) at 10.00 a.m., January 20, 1942, during an enemy air-raid on the divisional commander's observation post, where I had come from Ponizovye. My wound was dressed at once and the doctor diagnosed a

double fracture of the right shin. I ordered him to take me to Army CP and asked to keep my mishap a secret. However, by the time I reached Army CP everybody knew I was wounded. Army doctors were waiting for me when I reached CP, and suggested amputating the leg. But I refused.

Unfortunately, this episode, so usual in war, occurred when the offensive was at its height. So far, the Army had fulfilled only the first half of its mission. So I decided to stay with the Army until all objectives were attained despite my condition and wasted no time in informing Front HQ and the Supreme Command about it. I had weighed the matter carefully. The plan had been tended and nursed by me, I was deeply immersed in the fighting, and believed that despite being wounded I was better equipped than any other to bring the operation to its conclusion.

On the following day, I was handed a telegram from Supreme Headquarters which said Stalin had twice inquired about my health and hoped I would remain in action.

I replied that I had reported to the Supreme Command the day before, minutes after I was wounded, that I would stay in action to the end under all circumstances.

During the following 23 days, that is until we fulfilled our mission, I controlled the troops from a stretcher. Those 23 days probably cost me a few years of my life. Apart from physical pain, I suffered considerable mental anguish, chiefly because I was unable to visit the troops, help them organise and conduct combat and teach headquarters and officers to control the fighting.

But let us go back to the battle for Toropets. During the night of October 21 our units brought themselves into trim, pulled up their rear units, replenished their ammunition and formed assault groups for the street fighting. The attack was touched off at dawn. The first to strike was the 925th Infantry Regiment. The enemy used his main forces to repulse it. Taking advantage of this, our other units crashed through into the town. The panic-stricken nazis rushed westward and ran headlong into an ambush by specially assigned elements of the 925th Regiment and forward detachments of the 360th Division.

Most of the fleeing nazis were shot down, and many gave themselves up.

After two days of savage street fighting the 249th Infantry Division, the 48th and 39th infantry brigades and units of the 360th Infantry Division took full possession of Toropets by 10.00 a.m. January 21. The enemy troops defending the town were routed. The booty we captured was a rich prize for us at that time, consisting of 6 tanks, a variety of arms, 723 motor vehicles, a big supply of ammunition, about 450,000 shells, several million cartridges and 1,000 barrels of fuel. But the most important of all was the capture of 40 food stores, which nourished us for all of a month.

The success of the Toropets operation and the capture of enemy supplies meant a lot to us. Despite my serious condition, I rejoiced over it and reported it proudly to the Supreme Command.

In the Toropets area our fighting men discovered evidence of nazi atrocities. Among the captured documents there was one by the commander of an SS cavalry regiment routed during the liberation of Toropets. The document reported the "pacification" of the Starobinsk District in Byelorussia, saying that 6,504 civilians had been executed in addition to 239 prisoners of war. The report said the SS cavalry had acted in accordance with regimental Order No. 42, of July 27, 1941.

The commander of another regiment of the same brigade, von MacGill, stated in his "Report on the Conduct of the Pacification Operations in the District of the Pripet Marshes from July 27 to August 11, 1941" that "we drove the women and children into a swamp, but this did not have the necessary effect, as the swamp was not deep enough for them to drown. At a depth of 1 metre it was possible, in most cases, to reach firm ground (possibly sand)."

We found a telegram by the commander of the cavalry brigade to the commander of one of its regiments, dated August 2, 1941, which said Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS and Police, considered the number of peaceful inhabitants destroyed as "too negligible" and pointed out that "it is necessary to act radically". Himmler was said to have blamed commanders for being "too lenient in their conduct

of operations" and ordered that "the number of persons shot be reported daily".*

Frankly, my hair stood on end when the content of these documents was reported to me. We could barely believe at the time that mass annihilation had been made a matter of state policy by the Third Reich, that it was prosecuted with such savage brutality and so scrupulously controlled by top officials.

After we captured Toropets and the 4th Shock Army reached Staraya Toropa-Western Dvina, the Toropets operation was, in effect, concluded. In the course of it the Army had driven a deep wedge into the enemy's defences and destroyed his near-by reserves. The task set by the North-Western Front Command was thus fulfilled on schedule. Harassed by the winter cold, the lack of roads and the snowdrifts, and continuously harried by enemy air and the constant threat of encirclement due to the slowness of its neighbours, the Army had in 13 days of heavy fighting torn to shreds the enemy's defensive line, routed its nearest operational reserves and pursued the remnants of the enemy force along the axis of assault and the right flank for 140-150 km (in 11 days, that is, an average of 13-14 km a day).

On reaching the Velikiye Luki-Rzhev railway, the 4th Shock Army cut the communication line of the enemy groups dispositioned at Rzhev and Olenino.

Its mobility across terrain unsuited for mobility was among the biggest achievements of the 4th Shock Army in this operation. In manoeuvring for the possession of roads, towns and villages, our troops sidestepped the enemy's strongpoints, hammered the nazis out of their trenches and wiped them out in the field. The slowness of the tanks, artillery and supply units, it is true, reduced the rate of our offensive. But despite this, the infantry, supported by mortars, carried on at a good pace. The personnel gained added prowess. Most important of all, they learned that the nazis could be beaten. After all, most of my divisions had just been formed and had had no previous combat experience. Seventy per cent of the officers had been called

* *The Nuremberg Trial. Speeches of the Prosecutors*, London, 1946, p. 112.

up from the reserve and, naturally, had no experience either.

The 249th Infantry Division, which spearheaded the main effort and captured Peno, Andreapol and Toropets, acquitted itself splendidly. It was soon renamed the 16th Guard Division and decorated with the Order of Lenin. The other divisions did very well too.

Let me dwell briefly on the actions of our neighbours. The units on the right flank of the 22nd Army, our left neighbour, failed to take full advantage of our success. Their progress was no more than a crawl. By January 21 the 179th Infantry Division, which adjoined us, was only approaching Zhegorino-Kumanichnaya.

Neither was the 3rd Shock Army, our right neighbour, as successful as we had expected. Its right flank was still marking time on the initial line on January 21. In the centre, one infantry division had moved forward 60 km, encircled the nazi garrison at Kholm and was involved in drawn-out street battles. The divisions on the left flank advanced as much as 80 km, for they encountered no serious opposition. As a result, the 3rd Shock Army front was stretched over 200 km. Despite its advance, it was 60 km behind the 4th Shock Army, which laid our right flank bare to the nazis in Velikiye Luki.

The slowness of our neighbours exposed our two flanks, particularly the right. This compelled us to allot strength for coverage, something we could do only by weakening the Army in the sector of our main effort.

Here is what the situation looked like by the morning of January 22. The enemy was massing fresh strength in the Vitebsk area. His purpose was to delay us and build up defences along the Velizh-Demidov line in order to block our path towards Vitebsk and Rudnya. Fortifications were being built by the nazis at Velizh, Vitebsk, Demidov, Rudnya, and elsewhere. The enemy dreaded losing the Nevel-Velizh, Demidov-Dukhovshchina-Yartsevo and Vitebsk-Smolensk roads, and was rushing in reserves from the far rear.

The fresh nazi 83rd Infantry Division began detraining in Vitebsk in the latter half of January. The nazi 330th Infantry Division was being shunted from Liosno-Rudnya to Demidov. In addition, two new divisions were being brought up to the Rudnya and Vitebsk area. Defences in

and around Velikiye Luki. too, were being reinforced. Bent on stopping or at least delaying us at any price, the enemy employed swarms of planes, which were highly active around Toropets and Velizh.

By January 22 troops of the 4th Shock Army reached Staraya Toropa-Nelidovo. Due to bad roads, snowdrifts and fuel shortages, our artillery was 60-80 km behind, and our supply units even more than that. The tanks, too, were slow in coming up. Our communication lines became extended. Yet it is one of the axioms of warcraft to deny the enemy a chance to regain his wits, to restore order and to bring up reserves during a successfully developing offensive. That way one offensive often grows into another. In anticipation of such a favourable turn of events, the general must always keep reinforcing troops who are exploiting their success.

In the period under review, however, the reserves of the North-Western Front were evidently being misused, because the 4th Shock Army, which was doing so well in the main sector, did not get a single soldier throughout its two operations. It seems that the unexpected success of our offensives caught the Front Command off balance. Simply, they had not coped with the job of apportioning and moving up reserves. Since no reserves arrived, we needed to pause, to give the troops some rest, to get them back into fighting trim, to wait for straggling units and logistics and to improve communications. Otherwise, a new offensive, orders for which could come any day, would never yield the desired results.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ANOTHER OPERATION

The 4th Shock Army did not get any rest. It was turned over by order of the Supreme Command to the Kalinin Front in the morning of January 22. Colonel-General Ivan Konev, Commander of the Kalinin Front, ordered us to continue our advance, to swarm into the deep rear of the enemy and cut the communications of Army Group Centre, prevent its troops from retiring to rearward defences and set the stage for their annihilation in collaboration with other armies of the Kalinin and Western Fronts. The 4th Shock Army had to develop its Toropets-Velizh-Rudnya offensive and reach the Rudnya area by January 29. Thus, the Toropets operation grew over without a pause into a new one, the Velizh operation.

This operation differed from the Toropets drive. For one thing, we did not have to breach enemy defence lines. On the other hand, we had had no time to prepare for it, mounted it in stride, as it were, without any fresh forces, with overextended communications and with our tanks and artillery straggling behind. Good thing we had captured considerable food and other enemy stores.

At the start of the Velizh operation our troops encountered no organised resistance, save in the towns and villages. Enemy defences were spotty. There were centres of resistance in the inhabited points, but the country between them was covered only by nazi fire and by security services, guard detachments and reconnaissance patrols. It was the deep snow and the lack of roads, coupled with the bitter cold of the 1941-42 winter, that compelled the nazis to adopt this dispersed method of defence.

On January 24 our 39th Infantry Brigade mounted an

attack around Ilyino. It was abortive because the enemy had built strong fortifications in the village, while our reconnaissance had fallen down on its job. The attack force had to cover a stretch of 700 metres under enemy fire through deep snow without artillery support. It was not until nightfall that the units assembled close enough to the outskirts of Ilyino for a second attack at dawn. This time the brigade captured the outskirts quickly. A battle ensued. Subduing desperate nazi resistance, the brigade cleared Ilyino by mid-day on January 25, and moved on southward.

The 48th Infantry Brigade, operating towards Lepakovo, smashed an enemy group of some 160 men at Khukhovo on January 26 and approached Kresty in the afternoon. Kresty was garrisoned by the 3rd Destroyer Squad and 2nd Company of the 579th Landschutzbattalion (an aggregate of about 1,000 nazis). Col. Kupriyanov, who was in command of our brigade, continued the advance, hoping a sudden attack would swamp the enemy. He made this decision in the teeth of emphatic orders to sidestep fortified points and push on. Due to poor reconnaissance the strength of the Kresty garrison was unknown to him. Neither did Col. Kupriyanov know the nature of the nazi defences and their fire system. On January 26, one of his battalions advanced from the north-west, another from the north-east and a third from the south to envelop Kresty. The battalions touched off, but their attack on the strongly fortified enemy yielded no results.

The 39th Infantry Brigade arrived on the spot the following day. Col. Kupriyanov asked it for help. The 2nd Battalion of the 39th was shunted towards Markhlevo. The battalion battered its way into Markhlevo from the south-east, but its attempts to make further progress were stalled. For all this, the 39th Brigade managed to cut the road from Kresty to Velizh.

The unsuccessful fighting for Kresty showed once again that there was no point in engaging the enemy for the possession of dispersed and isolated strongpoints.

On January 28, I ordered the commanders of the 48th and 39th brigades to stop the pointless fighting and continue their advance, while the 358th Infantry Division of the second echelon was assigned to capture the town. The

48th Brigade left a cover detachment on the north-western outskirts of Kresty and moved southward towards the Western Dvina River. The 39th stationed a battalion and a reinforced company in Markhlevo and the Pochinok and Rubezhnik area, while its main force drove on southward as well. Towards the evening of the following day the troops reached the area west of Rudnya.

The three days which the two brigades had wasted at Kresty enabled the enemy to fortify Velizh. This impaired the Army's offensive and complicated the fighting for Velizh. If the 3-day delay had been avoided, Velizh could probably have been seized in stride.

I might stress again that troop control is the most responsible function of headquarters. When we had our pre-offensive confabs, priming for the operation, we made it clear that troops should not steer a straight course. We made it clear they should not mount head-on attacks against enemy strongpoints and should instead give them a wide berth. We reminded the commanders of this maxim time and again in the course of the offensive. We even issued a written order to this effect. Yet on a few occasions divisions and brigades committed themselves to battles for towns and villages. True, the winter's cold made these places of habitation especially attractive. Often, commanders went all out to capture them, because they wanted to give their troops a brief rest. They hoped, of course, that they would seize them in stride. When they failed, they got involved in drawn-out fighting. The commanders' intent was to impose their will on the enemy, but the reverse happened. There lay the mistake. It could be partially rectified if they lost no time in making a turning manoeuvre. But, generally speaking, they were instructed not to attack in stride. They were advised to send a reinforced reconnaissance troop, or a forward unit, ahead to try and take the town or village concerned. If the attempt failed, the main force was to make a detour.

The case of Kresty was obviously an oversight of our Headquarters, which had not furnished timely control. As a result, we lost three days. I do not absolve myself from blame for this distressing delay at Kresty. But I was wounded and could not get around. So I had no opportunity of going there myself to rectify the action of the

48th and 39th brigades. Regrettably, our Army HQ with Kurasov and Khlebnikov, the officer in command of the artillery, who helped me so much in controlling the troops, did not take any timely measures either.

I dwell specially on this case, because it had deplorable consequences. Our loss of time in reaching Velizh was the enemy's gain. The nazis made Velizh a tough nut to crack. Our troops fumbled for many months.

On orders from Army HQ the 358th Infantry Division, which advanced behind the two brigades towards the Western Dvina and Ilyino, sent its 1191st Infantry Regiment to capture Zemtsy Station and dismantle the railway on January 24. Subsequently, the regiment was to shield the Army's left flank, advancing southward toward Demidov.

On January 28 the 358th approached Kresty and relieved the 48th and 39th brigades, save 1st Battalion of the 39th, which was straddling the road from Kresty to Velizh. The division squared off to attack Kresty.

The nazi garrison became acutely aware of the danger. It asked for help. On the night of January 28-29, the 3rd Battalion of the nazi 257th Infantry Regiment, reinforced by artillery, left Velizh to help the Kresty garrison.

It swept 1st Company of the 39th Brigade in Pochinok out of the way and crashed through to Kresty. But the 1st Battalion recaptured Pochinok and sealed the southward route out of Kresty. On the same night, two battalions of our 1187th Regiment, 358th Infantry Division, approached Kresty from south-west and west. The 1st Battalion of the 1189th Regiment closed in from the north. This shut the ring round the enemy. The three battalions of the 1187th and one battalion of the 1189th regiments mounted a simultaneous attack in the morning of the following day and seized Kresty.

The nazis lost more than 1,000 men killed and wounded. Schuster, commander of the nazi 257th Regiment, and 17 other officers were killed. We captured 4 guns, 20 machine guns, 35 mortars, 5 tractors, 25 motor vehicles and a big store of ammunition. Our casualties, including the wounded, added up to about 200. In the evening of January 29, after the fighting was over, the 358th Infantry Division assembled in and around Pochinok. Its units had

operated efficiently in the battle for Kresly. Its fighting men showed stamina and courage in the severe winter conditions. Mj.-Gen. Zakhary Usachov, the Divisional Commander, had supervised his units efficiently. He took bold decisions consistent with the situation and carried them through with a firm hand.

In the meantime, the 360th Infantry Division on the Army's right flank left a battalion to screen Toropets and struck out southward along forest trails. It met almost no resistance and approached Velizh from north-west and west on January 29. It mounted an attack, and in the morning of January 30 its units broke into the town's outskirts.

On the extreme right flank of the Army, acting as a shield, the 51st Infantry Brigade advanced on the heels of the 360th Division towards Priluki Yakovlevo-Tserkovishche. On the night of January 28-29, it liberated Gulyari. The spoils of war there were just what we needed: five grain stores (360 tons of grain), two stores of flax fibre, two warehouses of bicycles, 57 horses, 53 head of cattle, 3 tractors, fuel, and the like.

The 249th Infantry Division, which had played so eminent a role in the Toropets operation, was now part of the Army reserve and was whipping itself into fighting trim again. It was being deployed from the Army's left flank to the right in the district of Losochi.

It will be apt to note here that the partisans had become an effective force by this time. On January 24 they captured Kunya Station and cut the Velikiye Luki Staraya Toropa railway. This gave some security to our right flank in that sector.

On the Army's left flank, the 332nd Infantry Division advanced on Romanovo, mopping up small enemy groups (remnants of the nazi 253rd Infantry Division). On January 29, it came to the Rudnya area.

Six days before, on January 23, I had ordered the commander of the 334th Division to concentrate in and around the town of Zemtsy and to send a reinforced infantry battalion against Nelidovo. Our intelligence had spotted enemy echelons there, and divisional reconnaissance estimated enemy strength at at least a regiment. In the circumstances, the whole division would have to strike. I

gave my consent. On January 24, the 334th reached the town. The nazi garrison there amounted to 3,000 men.

At night, a group of partisans filtered into Nelidovo and managed to create a panic in the enemy camp. This helped the division to seize the town by 10 in the morning. It captured 3 railway trains, 300 lorries, 11 guns, food stores, and a lot of other booty.

One battalion stayed in Nelidovo to await the 22nd Army (in whose zone of attack the town lay), while the rest of the 334th moved back to the Army's second echelon and assembled at Ilyino and Sokovichino by January 29.

Meanwhile, the 22nd Army, our neighbour on the left, engaged its 179th Infantry Division in a battle at Krasny Fakel and Sely, advancing slowly toward Nelidovo. Its 186th Division swarmed southward, battling for Skovorotyn, and its 119th was engaged at the town of Bely. The gap between the right-flank 179th Division of the 22nd Army and the left flank of the 4th Shock Army was 110 km by then, which compelled us to keep our garrison in Nelidovo and, what was more, to assign added forces to shield our left flank.

Our right neighbour, the 3rd Shock Army, too, was far behind us. Towards the close of January it was fighting battles along a 250-km front from Vatolino to Velikiye Luki. Failing to overwhelm enemy resistance at Velikiye Luki, the 3rd Army assumed the defensive.

As we see, both flanks of the 4th Shock Army were bare—our neighbour on the right lagging 100 km behind, and our left neighbour 110 km.

All the same, the 4th kept moving forward doggedly, pursuing and mopping up the remnants of defeated enemy units, crushing the rearguard of withdrawing enemy forces and subduing their forward element. In eight days of fighting, January 22 to 30, the Army advanced 100-115 km and arrived in the Velizh area. In those eight days we defeated considerable enemy strength, killed several thousand nazis and captured substantial spoils of war.

When it reached the Velizh-Usvyaty-Krasny Lug line, the Army still had its main force in the middle, for it was still battleworthy. To be sure, the personnel was worn out. Coupled with losses during the operation this impaired our strength considerably. The 249th Infantry Division had

been reduced to some 1,400 men, and the 48th Brigade to 1,500. The Army was afflicted by the effects of its unintermittent 21-day offensive, in which it had covered 250-300 kilometres across all but inaccessible terrain lacking roads and trails, its supply bases far away, its artillery and logistics straggling behind, plagued by shortages of ammunition and fuel, and, all too often, shortages of food as well.

We sent a message on this score to Front Headquarters on January 27, raising the question of ammunition and fuel and asking for communication facilities, for the lines we had were stretched to breaking-point by the rapid advance of our troops and we had used up all our signals gear.

We informed the Front Commander that our repeated attempts at establishing communications with our neighbours had failed, that our flanks were exposed and that the Army had no information about the enemy in the Vitebsk, Rudnya and Smolensk areas, nor about the nazis on our flanks. We pointed out that we could not get this intelligence ourselves, because we had no planes for air reconnaissance.

The nazi command became aware that Vitebsk, Orsha and Smolensk were our next objectives. The Vitebsk-Orsha-Smolensk triangle was a most important centre of nazi communications. They had their supply bases there, and their principal headquarters, and considered it the connecting link between army groups Centre and North. Our threat to this triangle spurred the nazis to a hasty deployment of fresh divisions from the west. They built up their strength in the area to six or seven infantry divisions.

The total nazi strength opposing the 4th Shock Army in the towns of Surazh, Velizh and Demidov amounted to 6,000 or 7,000 men exclusive of reserves, who were still on the march. Our troops outnumbered the enemy somewhat, but were fatigued by previous fighting and the marches, and, besides, were somewhat short of ammunition.

Our Army HQ lacked sufficiently exhaustive information about the enemy in our sector, and about his intentions, because the measures the nazis were taking transcended the framework of an army's intelligence service.

In the circumstances, we had no choice but to advance on Vilebsk to try and capture it. The mission was assigned to the 249th Infantry Division and the 51st Brigade, which were shielding our right flank. Three divisions and two brigades were to strike at Rudnya, with one brigade standing by in reserve.

On the left wing, an infantry division and a brigade were to advance on Demidov.

The appropriate operational order, which specified and finalised the combat missions for all units, was issued on January 30.

In the 28-day offensive, the troops of the 4th Shock Army advanced 250-300 km, fighting every inch of the way. They liberated about 3,000 villages and townships and a few bigger towns, and inflicted considerable losses on a large enemy force of about eight divisions. Nazi casualties added up to at least 11 or 12 thousand killed; furthermore, we had taken many prisoners.

We captured a large amount of enemy property – about 300 guns, as many mortars, some 400 machine guns, more than 1,200 lorries and cars, 2,000 horses, about 1,000 motorcycles, about 1,000 bicycles, 300 railway boxcars and about 100 flatcars, large ammunition dumps and food stores. Forty enemy planes were downed. I might add that our own losses in the two operations were considerably smaller.

Our offensive operations yielded valuable experience in organising attacks across difficult terrain in adverse weather.

The actions of the 249th Infantry Division were particularly instructive. The division had, in effect, served as the Army's shock force. It fought in the most crucial sectors of our Front and discharged its missions effectively.

The 360th Infantry Division, too, acquitted itself splendidly. It gained considerable experience in crossing all but inaccessible terrain and in forest fighting against strongly fortified points and previously prepared enemy defences.

A few words about the various headquarters. The headquarters of our divisions and other units differed in composition and efficiency. The most close-knit and effective were the headquarters of divisions that had previous combat experience. Giving leadership to headquarters composed of officers with no previous staff experience was therefore a

matter of the utmost importance throughout the two operations.

As for the 4th Shock Army HQ, it consisted essentially of knowledgeable and efficient officers. All in all, it was a well-balanced unit and coped quickly and effectively with the various tasks set by our command.

I recall with pleasure how enthusiastically and quickly the relatively green staff worked out the plan of its first offensive operation, the one at Toropets, on receipt of the appropriate directive from Front Headquarters and the Commander of the Army.

The pre-operation planning was completed in three days and nights of strenuous and dedicated work by the staff, particularly Lt.-Col. Beilin, Chief of the Operations Department.

The time we had to prime for the offensive was meagre. While still planning the operation, my staff officers met arriving troops and accompanied them to assembly areas. On top of this, they conducted briefings of unit commanders, and were also busy improving logistics.

In the course of the offensive it was one of the routine duties to issue orders and combat instructions every evening for the coming night and the following day. Staff officers delivered these orders to the troops. Cases when they were delivered late were extremely rare. In addition, the officers of our Operations Department verified fulfilment of the orders and often, particularly in the battles at Toropets and Staraya Toropa, stayed on with the troops and took part in the fighting. This method of troop control was justifiable in the difficult conditions.

After taking Toropets, Army HQ made use of the captured motorcycles with sidecars, which added considerably to the mobility of its staff. The signals people installed radio transmitters in captured vehicles, which accompanied top staff officers on their visits to the battle lines.

It will be recalled that on completing the Toropets operation, the 4th Shock Army was at once given a new mission. We had one night to turn the troops at an acute angle. In this one night, Army HQ drew up a new plan of operations, the main combat order and the various subsidiary ones, and new maps. After I endorsed them, they were delivered to the troops before daylight.

Some of our units, particularly the 39th Infantry Brigade under Col. Victor Poznyak, were in the enemy's rear and had to get their orders by air. This dangerous job, too, was performed by the staff. Col. Soroko, sent for liaison to the headquarters of the 39th Brigade, distinguished himself on one such mission, showing extraordinary resourcefulness. On setting out, he was told 39th Brigade HQ was located in Ponizovye. So his plane landed on the outskirts of the said village. Col. Soroko saw soldiers in helmets running towards the plane, and realised that they were Germans. The pilot trained his machine gun on them and opened fire, turned the plane and took off. After a long search, Col. Soroko finally spotted the 39th Brigade and handed the order from Army HQ to Commander Poznyak personally. The brave Colonel and his pilot, who was lightly wounded in the leg, returned from the mission with several dozen bullet-holes in the wings and fuselage of their aircraft.

The artillery did very good work. Much of the credit for this goes to Artillery Mj.-Gen. Nikolai Khlebnikov, Chief of the Army Artillery. He was as good an artillery chief as I ever saw. An intelligent and resourceful officer, he had a knack of adapting himself to any, even the most difficult, situations. Here is what he wrote to me about the period under review:

"Skillful employment of ski battalions, supported by mobile ski-borne mortar and artillery units, enabled us to drive wedges deep into enemy dispositions and stab from rear and flank. The gunners became so proficient in those severe winter conditions that even the heavy regiments (of 152-mm howitzers) learned to keep up with the troops.

"It was worse with our anti-aircraft element.

"Our AA arm added up to five battalions of 25-mm and 37-mm guns and two batteries of 76-mm guns. We had no gear for an early warning system. Our Air Observation, Warning and Communications Service had to use the communication facilities of our command. Often, our AA guns trailed far behind the infantry and were plagued by ammunition shortages. True, we remedied the situation somewhat by using captured enemy 37-mm shells. It will be only fair to say that 19 of the 29 planes shot down by our flak were accounted for by the 615th Separate Anti-Aircraft Battalion under Capt. Kalchenko."



N. M. Khlebnikov

We gained valuable experience in how to use ski battalions, who acquitted themselves well in some of the battles, particularly the capture of Staraya Toropa.

The two operations, especially the one at Toropets, prompted us to step up ski training among the troops.

Party and political orientation was highly prominent in the pre-offensive period and during our drive.

As soon as we received orders to assume the offensive, our political officers briefed men and commanders about it. On January 8, the day before the jump-off, they received appropriate instructions and set out for the various units. During the operations they stayed at the most crucial places, keeping up the men's spirits, helping political officers of units and focussing Party and political work on securing fulfilment of combat orders. They exercised guidance, too, over the daily work done by Party and Komsomol organisations in the companies, and assisted in ensuring ammunition and food supplies.

Party and Komsomol meetings were held in all units to stress the role of Communists and Komsomols in the coming offensive.

Special mention should be made of the Political Department of the 249th Infantry Division, which acted flexibly

and purposefully throughout the offensive. Its political officers kept abreast of developments and tackled the various specific tasks as they cropped up. They did not merely control the work of political officers in the units, but exercised effective leadership in combat missions.

The Army's Political Department devoted itself extensively to improving logistics. Since good roads were immensely important for bringing up supplies, the political bodies of the rearward units helped the command in ensuring road maintenance and repairs.

The Army press, too, was of a high standard, and particularly the Army newspaper, *Bayonet the Enemy*.

The paper printed daily reports about the movement of units, reported the battles fought by companies, battalions and regiments, and printed accounts of daring exploits and of the heroism of men and officers. The correspondents used all available means of transport—flagging down cars, gasoline tankers, tanks and ambulances—to get back from the battle lines to the editorial office, which was located in specially adapted lorries.

Sometimes, when time was too short to write or type a report, correspondents would dictate it directly to the typesetter. The newspapermen marched with the troops, collecting first hand information about the bravery of the men, their hatred of the enemy, and their loyalty.

Frequently, they went over the top with the troops or helped repulse nazi counter attacks.

True, there were some flaws in the work of our political departments, chiefly due to a lack of experience by most of the officers.

The enthusiasm, bravery, devotion and loyalty of the men and officers of the 4th Shock Army could not have been of a higher order.

We cleared out the nazis from several hundred towns and villages, whose populations hailed the returning Red Army joyously.

We helped the local authorities to restore government and Party bodies, to get the economy going again and to re-establish order. The local people were eager to help the Army in every way they could. The collective farmers of Beglovo village, for example, provided a whole battalion with a two days' supply of food. The people of Kolpino

village presented the 360th Infantry Division with 20 poods of rye, 86 poods of potatoes and a lot of forage, and assigned 13 horse-driven carts to transport their gift. The collective farmers of Grishino village volunteered to repair bridges and clear roads to facilitate troop movements.

The Army's logistical units and establishments did an immense amount of work in the course of the operation. How difficult their job was needs no telling. It will be only fair to say that supplies, particularly supplies of food, fuel and even ammunition, had to be obtained chiefly from the enemy.

Many of the participants in the Toropets and Velizh operations received well earned awards.

Many years have passed, but I am still proud of the privilege I had of commanding the 4th Shock Army, which covered itself with glory in the two operations and fulfilled its mission in unspeakably severe conditions.

On February 13, after the 4th Shock Army had completed the Toropets and Velizh operations successfully, I turned the Army over to my successor and went to hospital.

Moscow theatrical companies performed in the hospital's club hall, and in wards for bed ridden patients. We were also visited by workers from Moscow factories and peasants from collective farms around Moscow. They came as strangers, but once we got to talking we felt a sense of communion, because everybody's thoughts were centred on one thing only — to drive out the invaders.

The theatrical performances and the cordial visits were evidence of the concern our Communist Party showed for men temporarily out of action.

My service with the 4th Shock Army culminated the first period of my wartime record in the Western sector of the Soviet-German front. After my recuperation, I was appointed Commander of the Front operating between the Don and Volga rivers.

A POSTSCRIPTUM

Let us sum up some of the results of the first period of the Great Patriotic War. Let us analyse them from the standpoint of strategy, because the matter has not been dealt with anywhere near exhaustively in Soviet historical literature. True, our historians usually date the end of the first period as November 19, 1942, when our big counter-offensive began in the Stalingrad Battle. All the same, the events of the period reviewed in this volume have distinctly specific features. For one thing, it was the initial and most difficult, and also the least investigated period, of the war.

The fighting in the initial period had a very tangible impact on later developments. It affected the strategic solution adopted by the belligerent powers.

Strategy is one of the elements of the art of war. It constitutes a system of conceptions related to the organisation, preparation and employment of a country's armed forces. It concerns the theory and practice of the higher military leadership in the handling of combat missions. Military strategy, we know, is built upon the political tasks set by the state. Whether it is successful, depends on how accurately and profoundly it takes the moral, political, economic and military possibilities of its own side, and those of the enemy, into consideration. Military strategy also exercises an influence on the policy of the government in the pre-war period and in wartime.

From the Marxist viewpoint, military strategy concerns the following questions: a) it determines the strategic objectives of the war as a whole, and of its various periods; b) estimates the strength and resources essential for victory;

c) plans the character and methods of warfare by all arms of the service, especially in the initial period of the war; d) defines the principles governing the development, preparation, mobilisation, concentration and deployment of armed forces and the activation, training and employment of strategic reserves; e) develops schemes and plans of military action; f) organises control over operations and strategic co-operation of all arms of the service, and handles a myriad other important problems.

I have listed the functions related to military strategy because I want to show that the initial period of the past war was the crucible in which the rudimentary strategies of both sides were tested, revealing their strong and weak sides.

Today, we clearly see the various, sometimes extremely serious, strategic mistakes we made at the time. There was, however, a sound basis for the solutions we had for most of the rockbottom issues. We also see some of the strong points in the strategic conception of the nazis, though the evil of its basis puts them in the shade and reduces them, in the final analysis, to nothing

An analysis of the strategic solutions produced for specific problems in the early period of the war by both belligerents reveals the nature of the merits, and flaws, inherent in the two strategic systems. Also, it reveals the diametrically opposite purport of their basic trends

To begin with, however, we should stress the immutable Marxist thesis that war is a continuation of policy by other, forcible methods. War is, in effect, one of the means of discharging policy. This is why it is important in a war, especially the initial period of it, to look back at the international situation that prevailed before it broke out, and at the domestic policies of the belligerent states.

Selection of top officers, whose job it is to develop and carry through military strategic matters, is also of the utmost significance.

The international situation at the outbreak of the war was anything but favourable for the Soviet Union. Certain groups in Britain, who dreaded a nazi attempt to cross the Channel, did their utmost to drag the Soviet Union into the war. They had the wholehearted support of the U.S. imperialists. The Soviet people and their government were

aware, of course, that nazi Germany was likely to attack us. It was important, however, to delay this development, because the Red Army was not yet fully prepared. I have already referred in the opening chapter to the military strategic doctrine worked out by the Communist Party. It was a doctrine that fitted perfectly the conditions of the war. What we needed was time, lots of time, to prepare the troops, to reorganise them, to modernise and replace antiquated equipment, to instruct the troops in handling new weapons, and to train the body of officers in troop control.

It is an open secret that the most important and essential quality an army must possess is continuous combat preparedness abreast of modern standards at every given hour.

The flaws in our army structure were due in many respects to the loss of top officers as a result of the violations of socialist legality. This does not go to say that the men appointed to the top commands were entirely incapable of running the army. Yet they lacked experience and knowledge, because in many cases they were driven up the ladder two or three ranks at a time. With few exceptions, they acquitted themselves honourably as capable generals, but knowledge and experience came to them in difficult circumstances and at a very high price to us.

Our top government bodies, whose job it had been to see to the country's security, namely, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the General Staff, knew that a war with Germany would catch us at a disadvantage. This prodded them into action, regrettably injudicious. Instead of stepping up and expanding our defence potential at the highest possible rate and, at once, undertaking vigorous measures against possible treachery on Hitler's part at every given hour, they strove by all possible means to avoid giving Germany a cause or pretext to attack the Soviet Union. This was not an indication of faith in the decency of the nazis. Evidently, Stalin was swayed to some extent by the nazi promise that a long pause in the war would ensue after the Polish, French and Balkan campaigns.

Our General Staff had information about the imminent danger of an attack on the U.S.S.R. But the General Staff failed to convince Stalin that this information was reliable. Neither did it succeed in convincing him in the possible

consequences of ignoring this information. Our intelligence did not work hard enough to obtain the maximum of information either. On receiving the initial reports about the nazi troop build-up along our western frontier we should have stepped up and improved our reconnaissance. There were certain avenues whereby the General Staff and the Commissariat for Defence could have taken counter-measures over the head of the government, notwithstanding Stalin's reluctance, but neither proved grown to the task.

The war did not come as a surprise to us from the political point of view. But it caught us unawares strategically. Operationally and tactically the surprise element was complete.

Here is what Franz Halder, Chief of the nazi General Staff of Land Forces, wrote on June 22, 1941:

"The tactical surprise of the enemy has apparently been achieved along the entire line. . . . That the enemy was taken by surprise is evident from the facts that troops were caught in their quarters, that planes on the airfields were covered up, and that enemy groups faced with the unexpected development at the front inquired at their headquarters in the rear what they should do. More effects of the surprise may be anticipated from the assaults of our armour."*

Those were essentially the unfavourable factors that assailed us and made the initial period of the war so dreadfully difficult. It was the very reverse for the nazis.

The international political situation favoured them as well, because their assault on the Soviet Union was consistent with the fundamental mission assigned to them by the extremist reactionary groups of international imperialism. The domestic policy of the nazi Reich, too, was centered on immediate and specific preparation for war ever since Hitler came to power. There is no need to speak here at length about the Wehrmacht's cadre and its combat experience. The fascist regime had at its disposal a close-knit, highly competent caste of Prussian militarists, whom Hitler humoured in every possible way and whom he afforded the opportunity to demonstrate their "art and

* Halder, *Diary*, Vol. 6, p. 161.

prowess" and accumulate experience of modern warfare for a revenge seeking holocaust.

But let us dwell at somewhat greater length on the problems of military strategy.

There were far-reaching discrepancies between our theoretical concepts and the concrete development of events in the initial period. Among other things, we had intended to take the battle to the aggressor's territory soon after he would attack us. We expected to be able to mount offensive actions in response to the first assault. We did not expect to have to assume the defensive. We built our assumption on the objectively accurate premise that our military and economic potential excelled the potential of the probable aggressor. We failed to reckon with the possibility of the enemy's temporary superiority and the necessity of extensive defensive actions in the first stage of the war. Hence our continuous and lamentably unsuccessful attempts to begin offensive operations in the early period, in a situation that was entirely unfavourable. It was not until later that our concept, which was fundamentally correct, could be materialised. We cleared Soviet land of the enemy and took the war to enemy territory.

We made mistakes in the matter of concentrating and deploying our armed forces on the eve of the war. These mistakes stemmed from the fear entertained by competent quarters that hasty concentration and deployment of troops along our western frontier would serve as a pretext for a nazi aggression. Due to this fallacious attitude we lost a lot of precious time.

The plans of our operations, including that of our counter-offensive at Moscow, did not always conform to the prevailing situation and could not therefore be fully executed by the troops. All too often, missions given to the troops were more than what they could cope with. The actions and intentions of the enemy were wrongly assessed, and our counter-measures often went wide of the mark.

In the first few days of the war, for example, when there was evidence of the nazis' intending to cut off a large Soviet force in the so-called Bielostok Bulge, we attempted to mount a counter-offensive instead of retiring to a more suitable line. Yet according to Franz Halder it was just

such an organised Soviet withdrawal to previously prepared rearward lines that the nazis dreaded most.

At the time when a part of Army Group Centre was making its southward turn in late August 1941, and our Bryansk, Reserve and South-Western Fronts should have concentrated on shielding the sector of the planned nazi break-through, the Supreme Command issued orders for offensive missions, although it knew from intelligence reports that the enemy was veering south. It is only fair to say here that the Bryansk Front Command, too, failed to grasp the nazi intentions and interpreted them as a manoeuvre aimed at outflanking Bryansk and thrusting at Moscow from a new direction.

Some of our writers today describe the establishment of the Bryansk Front as a feat of anticipation by Supreme Headquarters. This is entirely untrue.

Our strategic errors in the initial period of the war were among the main reasons for our serious early setbacks. But a closer look will reveal that they were not errors of principle, but rather errors of a particular nature unrelated to the rudimentary basis of our strategy. This is why our strategy ultimately enabled us to win the war.

Let us now deal with the strategy of our enemies, the German nazis, which yielded them distinct success in the early period of the war and total defeat in its subsequent stages.

It should be borne in mind, however, that many highly pertinent strategic principles could not be verified in peace time. There was a big difference in this respect between the belligerents before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War.

The principles of Soviet military strategy could not be put to a practical test extensively enough, and were therefore no more than scientific assumptions. Nazi strategists, on the other hand, had ample opportunities to make such a verification before Hitler ventured on war against the Soviet Union, and had reason to believe that their doctrine had stood the test. Actually, their test proved insufficient. For various reasons, the Wehrmacht's previous opponents were either considerably weaker, such as Poland, or had entirely incorrect and antiquated conceptions of warfare, such as France. Nothing but a big war against a versatile

and strong enemy, a war entailing a real and strenuous effort, could have tested and verified the principles of strategy conclusively enough.

The Soviet Union, thus, had underestimated the Wehrmacht's experience of modern warfare, while the Nazi staffs, and Hitler himself, overestimated this experience beyond all proportion and thought their doctrine was suited to crush all possible adversaries.

Hitler's staff officers, it will be noted, took an entirely different view after the Second World War was over, that is, after they had had a chance to compare their earlier ideas with the experience of war against the Soviet Union. Let me quote a voluble, but none the less expressive, passage from an article by General Kurt von Tippelskirch, "Operational Command Decisions in the Critical Stages of the Land War":

"Technical equipment and leadership during the Balkan campaign of 1941 were so overwhelmingly superior to those of the enemy that the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Similar premises were on hand in the Polish campaign of 1939, though not to such a big degree. Besides, the Polish Command did its German opponent the 'favour' of choosing to defend the outer perimeters of the country in a theatre of war surrounded on three sides by the German armies, and even to attempt offensive actions in this unfavourable situation despite the numerical and technical superiority of the Germans.

"The French Command was intent in 1940 to employ 'defence as the most effective form of warfare [here Tippelskirch quotes Clausewitz.—A.E.] to stem the German advance along the shortest front line of its own choice: Maginot Line-Maas to Namur-Antwerpen, and to strike for victory later, as in the First World War, that is, by blockading Germany and giving France's allies (Great Britain and, it hoped, the United States) a chance to arm. The French Command was confident in such a development, because it thought it had chosen a stronger method of warfare with an initially negative objective. Despite the experience of the then recent war in Poland, it had not yet understood that the Germans had injected two new elements into combat—operational employment of mobile units and employment of air in support of ground forces.

"These novelties enabled the Germans to make breaches that could not be repulsed, unless, if at all, the command had something to counter-balance the forms of assault developed by the Germans.

"This is something the French lacked. Leaning heavily on the experience of the First World War, the French Command did not believe in the likelihood of sudden break-throughs in stride, whose whirlwind speed made them operationally irreparable. What made matters worse for the French Command was that the German troops effected their break-through on the Maas between Sedan and Namur, that is, where the French least expected an offensive. The decision to make the main effort in this sector did not come easily to the German Command....

"Jodl notes in his diary in February 1940 that 'the thrust at Sedan was an operational circumvention, where the God of war could well have caught us off balance'. We owe it to the incorrect disposition of the Anglo-French forces, which contradicted all operational possibilities, that the God of war was merciful to the Germans. The French Command, which disposed of 19 French and British motorised divisions and three light divisions, failed to employ at least some of them as a reserve in the central sector; if it had done so, it could have flung them into the breaches before it was too late.

"Instead, the French Command, like the Polish, did the German Command a 'favour' and had ample occasion to recall Moltke's maxim that 'an error made in the original disposition of strength is scarcely rectifiable in the subsequent course of the war'. The French used their motorisation merely as a means of transport and flung the main strength of their mobile units toward the Belgian-Dutch border, where they were instantly pinned down by Army Group B.

"The situation might have been entirely different if the French Command had stationed its troops west of the Maginot Line along the Franco-Belgian border with its powerful field fortifications, and had let the Belgians and the Dutch fend for themselves against the German advance despite all political considerations, and had kept the main strength of its mobile troops in reserve behind the front line. It was this that the German Command dreaded

most of all. It breathed a sigh of relief when it received word of the three left flank armies (the 1st and 7th French Armies and the British Army) entering Belgian territory. To be sure, if the French had done what the Germans dreaded, the superiority of the Luftwaffe and operational employment by the Germans of their mobile units would still have been very effective, if not decisive, but the 'first encounter with the enemy's main forces would have created an entirely new situation' and it would have been much more difficult for the German Command to crash through to the seashore and lock up the three left-flank armies in the Lille-Dunkirk kettle.

"In the circumstances, the operational plan, aimed from the first at encircling the three enemy armies through the establishment of a constantly growing flank shield along the Aisne and Somme rivers, could be achieved with but little difficulty.

"Supported by the Luftwaffe, which had gained complete control of the air, the German army was so distinctly superior to the French, which had lost nearly two-fifths of its best divisions and was weakened by the incapacitation of the Belgian, Dutch and British armies, that no definite critical exigencies requiring new solutions arose throughout the French campaign."

This analysis of the Wehrmacht victories prior to the assault on the Soviet Union reveals clearly how foolhardy it had been for the nazis to rely on their experience. Yet it was this experience that the nazis drew on in their hope of a whirlwind victory over the Soviet Union.

Tippelskirch writes on:

"The overwhelming success in the west convinced Hitler that a similar success was certain against the Soviet Union. All operational considerations were obscured by the psychological. 'There is reason to expect,' Hitler said in a conversation with army commanders on December 5, 1940, 'that the Russian army, once assaulted, will suffer a still greater defeat than the French in 1940.' In another conversation with army commanders, on June 9, 1941, he added that 'the Russian armed forces are a clay giant without a head. They do not have good generals, and are poorly equipped. . . . It should be our objective to destroy the Russian army, to capture the most important industrial

areas and demolish all other industrial areas, and, moreover, to seize the area round Baku.' It was on the strength of this conception that Directive No. 21, December 18, 1940, that is, the Barbarossa Plan, was drawn up, whose first paragraph says, 'the German Wehrmacht must be prepared to bring Soviet Russia to its knees in a rapid military campaign'."*

However, let us look at the more substantive aspects of nazi military strategy, shaped entirely by the policy of German imperialism. Germany's aggressive policy was based on the cupidity of those who benefited from it, on the one hand, and had to contend, on the other, with the relative paucity of resources. Germany, we know, did not have a sufficiently strong military and economic potential due to its relatively small population, the insufficient home supply of raw materials and foods, coupled with wide-open, vulnerable frontiers and its geographical disposition in the heart of Europe among major states. It was these objective factors that compelled the German militarists to base their strategic planning on incidental factors, even accidental to a degree, such as preparedness for sudden attack. This, indeed, is the cause behind Germany's traditionally reckless blitzkrieg strategy, which is offensive to the utmost and highlighted by concentration of all effort at a given moment against one of its adversaries with the basic purpose of putting him to his knees with one sledgehammer blow. Despite the failure of such strategy in 1914-18, the German imperialists reverted to it again in 1939 and 1941. Yet strategy of this sort could yield no more than temporary success, as practice proved so conclusively.

Let us look closer at the basic defects of nazi military strategy in relation to Hitler's attack on the U.S.S.R. and the early period of the hostilities on the Eastern front. The whole world knows today that the main nazi miscalculation was the one which Vladimir Lenin formulated so clearly in his time "The most dangerous thing in a war," said Lenin, "is to underrate the enemy and to reassure ourselves with the thought that we are the stronger. That is a

* *Bilanz des zweiten Weltkrieges*, Oldenburg/Hamburg, 1953, S. 49-51, 52.

most dangerous thing, which may lead to defeat in the war.”*

We are farthest from the thought that victory in a war is a mechanical effect of absolute numerical superiority. Estimating a prospective enemy's strength is a hard proposition. It calls for profound and exhaustive knowledge of the country concerned, of its people, as well as its armed forces. The judgement of the German General Staff and all those links in the nazi machinery of state involved in drawing up the war plan against the Soviet Union, had been faulty. They made a series of gross mistakes in analysing our strength, our resources and our possibilities. Naturally, I refer solely here to factors of a purely military nature.

In drawing up the Barbarossa Plan, the nazis took account of the troops we had in our frontier areas (the first strategic echelon). They almost entirely overlooked the forces we had in other parts of the country (second strategic echelon), yet in our time, the time of the Second World War, it took no more than a few days to engage these troops. Even in a vast country like ours it took a week at most, and a fortnight only in a few cases. As for wartime activation (third strategic echelon), they ignored it altogether, evidently on the assumption that they would gain victory before such activated troops could be deployed for action. This means that the nazis expected to attain their basic objective within 3 months, because after that there was every possibility of our using troops activated in the general mobilisation. Yet if we look at the Barbarossa Plan, for all its whirlwind timing, it was obviously designed for a more protracted period. The fact that the nazis did not reckon with our third strategic echelon was much more than a gross blunder; it contradicted their own fundamental planning. Possibly, they thought they would “overfulfil” their plan.

Need I refer to dozens of other miscalculations based on a perverted notion of the economic, moral and political features of the Soviet state.

Almost complete disregard of the fact that war is a two-sided proposition was another essential fault of nazi

* Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 173.

strategy. The nazis forgot that the opponent is not merely an object of their action, that he is capable of counter acting, that he has his own war objectives, that he, too, has the will to resist.

The defect of nazi military planning lay above all in the methods employed by their troops. Offensive and attack was the only type of combat Hitler's General Staff acknowledged. Here is the course of action defined in the Barbarossa Plan for concentration and deployment, as quoted by General Hermann Hoth:

"It is to be brought home as a supreme law to every commander and his troops in this campaign: advance quickly all the time! Keep up the attack everywhere through determined employment of all weapons and tireless pursuit of the enemy. Panzers, artillery and heavy weapons are to be pushed far forward. That is the only way to disperse the Russian army and to annihilate the bulk of the Russian troops before they get across the Dnieper and the Western Dvina."*

Take a closer look at the above passage and you will see that it refers more to pursuit than to an offensive in the proper sense of the word. The same is true of the Barbarossa Plan, which prescribes "march with combat" and "march without combat" as the main types of action in the campaign.

Hitler's strategists did not envisage an offensive in the strictly military sense of the word, that is, as stubborn and more or less protracted engagements designed to breach defences in depth. There is no hint in the Barbarossa Plan of the possibility of protracted defensive action by the German side.

The makers of the nazi war plan scorned the combat efficiency of the Red Army. Take the utterances of Mj.-Gen. Erich Marcks on this score in his operational project, "East", drawn up in August 1940, which served as the core of the Barbarossa Plan.

"Since the Russians do not possess the numerical superiority they had in the First World War," Marcks wrote, "we should expect that they will not be able to assemble their forces, stretched thinly across vast territory, in order

* Hermann Hoth, *Panzer Operationen*, Heidelberg, 1956, S 146.

to take centralised counter-measures once their defences are pierced. Fighting isolated battles, the Russians will soon be compelled to lay down their arms in face of superior German troops and leadership.”*

The blunt arrogance of the nazis was so great that they denied technical skill and proficiency to Soviet people. This aberration blew up in their faces during the war. Among the numerous discourses by captured Hitler officers, of which his book actually consists, B. H. Liddell Hart quotes the following in his *The Other Side of the Hill*:

“Before the war it had been a general assumption in Germany . . . that the Russians were not mechanically minded or skilled, but this assumption was disproved by experience. They have a natural sense for technical matters, perhaps more so than some Western people.”**

In substance, the disorderly nazi offensive in several operational, often even several strategic, directions, in the absence of sufficient flank coverage, was prompted not only by contempt of the enemy but of the elementary rules of warcraft as well. The nazis could not care less, especially in the initial period of the war, about the need for bringing up logistical units and establishments. They did not give the troops time to regroup, which is absolutely essential and unavoidable in a campaign, especially an offensive campaign.

The German General Staff made no distinction between the countries and the armed forces the Wehrmacht had tackled. The directive quoted by Hoth says in so many words that “the armed struggle in this campaign should be based on the operational principles which have justified themselves in the Polish campaign”***.

Speaking of the miscalculations made by the German General Staff, we should note that from the standpoint of strategy these were not the kind of accidental mistakes, that we, the Soviet strategists, had happened to make, but organic errors which were bound to end in disaster for the Wehrmacht. The main miscalculation of all—overestimation

* *Beilage 2 der Wehrwissenschaftlichen Rundschau*, March 1956, Darmstadt, S. 70.

** Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, London, 1956, p. 242.

*** Hoth, op. cit., S. 146.

of their own forces and underestimation of ours—created the nazi illusion of a whirlwind victory. Hence the absence of provisions for a protracted war. When all is said and done, the German General Staff had laid plans for just the opening phase of the war. What was more, despite the marked superiority gained through the surprise factor and the Soviet losses of war machines, armaments and ammunition during that period, the nazis still had to revise their plan repeatedly, because its “assumptions” were foiled by Soviet counter-actions.

None of the basic objectives of the Barbarossa Plan was reached, either in capturing strategically important centres or in destroying Soviet manpower. Yet before they started the war, the nazi strategists were so self-confident they said Soviet offensive actions would only favour their plans.

General Marcks wrote: “The Russians would do us a favour by attacking. But we should expect the Russian ground forces to stay strictly on the defensive against us, and only their air force and navy, notably their submarines, will operate offensively.”*

It should be stressed that the Barbarossa Plan miscalculations were not accidental. They were not mistakes made by any definite group of General Staff officers. Nor were they the result of Hitler’s military ignorance, as some writers contend. They sprang from the very substance of German imperialism’s recklessly adventurous policy.

General A. Philippi intimates that “the chief of the Army General Staff had invited the more trusted officers of the General Staff from subordinate commands to take part in the planning. They were to set out their conceptions, irrespective of his own judgement. These officers confirmed the objectives set by the OKH, although some of the methods they suggested in achieving these objectives may have differed.”**

This speaks for itself. It shows that the General Staff, the Wehrmacht’s brain trust, was of like mind concerning the war aims. The General Staff of the Wehrmacht handled operational matters, intelligence, counter intelligence and logistical planning. An officer who had finished the General Staff Academy and held a definite post in the

* A. Philippi, *Das Pripjetproblem*, S. 69.

** Ibid., S. 10.

armed forces, not necessarily the General Staff proper, was considered a General Staff officer. True, Philippi mentioned differences in approach, but these refer to the narrow province of operational and tactical method. In the proper sense of the word, however, the methods, too, were identical. Take the two most typical preliminary blueprints of the aggression against the U.S.S.R., the Marcks project and that of Infantry General Georg von Sodenstern.

They are identical with the Barbarossa Plan as regards the basic premises: a) the Wehrmacht is superior to the Red Army, b) it is possible to put Russia out of the war by means of a whirlwind campaign, annihilation of the Soviet armed forces in the western regions and speedy occupation of vital centres in the European part of the country.

The only difference was that one of the strategists suggested two flanking thrusts with converging axes (Sodenstern) and the other (Marcks) suggested divergent efforts. The OKH, for its part, decided on three groups, with the strongest central group driving for Moscow.

The thoroughly belted strategists can do nothing today but argue about which of the plans was the best. Actually, all three were equally foolhardy. True, different situations would have arisen in each case, but it is quite certain that none of them were practicable, because they had common fundamental flaws.

We might note, too, that the men who led Hitler's armies have not grasped the reasons for their defeat to this day.

Take what General Hoth says about the causes of Germany's defeat, which became obvious even in the early period of the war. "The historian who will try to explain why the 1941 campaign fell short of its objectives despite all the overwhelming military victories," Hoth writes, "will list these three reasons, among others: first, underestimation of the political and military resistance of Russia; then, the disparity between the politico-strategic aims set by Hitler and the operational aims of the military command and, third, as a result of this disparity Hitler's interference in the conduct of operations, which prejudiced the so necessary confidence between the military and political leaderships."*

* Hoth, *op. cit.*, S. 139.

The first of these causes is, indeed, one of the soundest evaluations of the Wehrmacht's downfall, namely, underestimation of the strength and resources of the Soviet state and people. But, in effect, this sound judgement is reduced to naught, because it is aligned with factors less than secondary or, more properly, invented. All talk about the disparity between politico-strategic aims and operational objectives is designed simply to boost the militarists (politicians, it exhorts, should always take note of what military experts say). Hitler, as a matter of fact, always took the advice of the military experts and picked the most desirable of their variants. This is borne out by his choice of the most effective plan to crush France.

The very concept of strategy, which the Wehrmacht generals built upon the experience of the preceding war, essentially retains the flaws of pre war nazi strategy. Let us again quote Hoth on this score:

"The war plan is the chief object of strategy, as Clausewitz also maintains. It defines the purpose and aim of the war, and accordingly determines the forces essential for it, seeks to establish the opponent's main force, the capability and character weaknesses of the enemy nation and the mood of its government. It takes account of the effect on other countries, and on the strength of these often conflicting elements strives to pick out the focus in the enemy camp at which its own concentrated strength should strike."*

This definition of strategy, though logical in some of its aspects, is applicable to the strategy of an aggressive state banking on lightning success. According to Hoth, a war plan provides for no more than the main attack, directed against the enemy's weakest spot and the forces he has at the outbreak of a war. This shows that the lessons of the war have been lost on the militarists.

No analysis of the initial period will be complete if it overlooks the new factors in it. as compared with initial periods of previous wars, especially the First World War, the nearest in time and in scale.

Let us take a brief look at the early period of the First World War. True, some writers still argue about its limits

* Hoth, *op. cit.*, S. 12-13.

in time, but those are belated controversies. The most widespread view is that the initial period of the 1914-18 war lasted from the day of the declaration of war and the general mobilisation to the day the general battles broke out between the belligerent forces. It was a short period, in which events took a relatively placid course. The troops in the border zones were essentially inactive. It was their mission to shield the concentration and deployment of the various armies. Actions were fought solely by cavalry reconnaissance groups at a relatively short distance from the frontiers. The Russian army was the only exception, for it mounted offensive actions on a fairly large scale in East Prussia before newly activated troops had been concentrated and deployed. But this was done under strong allied diplomatic pressure.

Mobilisation, strategic concentration and deployment of armed forces under the operational coverage of relatively slender regular forces was the main feature of the initial period of the First World War. The length of this period, which depended on how quickly these measures were completed, was fairly short. a little over a fortnight. It is a salient factor, too, that neither side gained any special advantages over its opponent in this period.

Thus, the actions of the initial period had no effect to speak of on the subsequent course of the war.

Some writers believe the initial period should include the general battles, and not only the preparation for them. It is not my intention here to reconcile or oppose these two points of view. It is irrelevant to the matter in hand. The point I want to make is that the initial period of the Second World War as a whole, and of the Great Patriotic War in particular, played a far more substantial role than that of the First World War, although it was not decisive.

It will be recalled that the Second World War was touched off by the sudden nazi invasion of Poland simultaneously from several directions. Germany completed its war preparations and the mobilisation, concentration and deployment of its troops before the war began. The Western front was the theatre of what has come to be known as a "phony war", with both sides militarily idle despite concentration and deployment of huge forces.

In the case of France, Germany also achieved operational surprise, which largely conditioned France's defeat.

Japan's assault on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 came as another surprise, this time for the United States.

The Great Patriotic War was marked in the initial period by the attacker's advantage. We had had to concentrate and deploy our land army to repulse the aggressor after he had already crashed across our border.

The enemy's rapid penetration deep into our territory prevented us from building up effective defences and frustrated mobilisation in the western parts of our country—Lithuania, Latvia and, partly, Byelorussia and the Ukraine. The factor of operational strategic and tactical surprise put the strategic initiative into the hands of the nazis, enabling them to wrest a position of advantage from us throughout the initial period.

The other thing we ought to bear in mind is that the initial period of the Second World War was, on the whole, marked by determined operations, for the aggressor had mobilised and deployed his main forces beforehand to secure the surprise factor and achieve decisive successes in the shortest possible time.

The attacked countries had had to defend themselves with all available strength. Should this lead us to the conclusion that the very logic of things makes peace-loving countries trail behind the aggressors in military matters? Of course not. The fact that they were unprepared is due to errors by their respective leaders in appraising the international situation. The devotion to peace of the socialist countries is not spineless pacifism. It is active struggle for the preservation of peace by all disposable means, including expansion of their defence potential.

To sum up, for the U.S.S.R. the initial period of the war represented warfare in which it strove to wrest the strategic initiative from the enemy. Plainly, this could only be done by counter-offensives. The country had to gather strength and pick a propitious moment. It is wrong to assume that we picked it unerringly, at our first try. We attempted counter-offensives while we were still on the Dnieper at Smolensk, and then again in August 1941. But these attempts, though largely positive in depleting the enemy's strength, did not give us the strategic initiative. It

was not until the counter-offensive at Moscow, the time for which was well picked, that we won the initiative. The Moscow counter-offensive culminated in a major victory, although we failed to achieve the set objectives, that is, to annihilate the main strength of the enemy's central group and break its link with Army Group North.

This failure was due to the still insufficient equipment of the Soviet troops, on the one hand, because war production in the eastern regions had not yet been expanded to the necessary proportions,* and to subjective factors, on the other, chiefly the lack of experience of officers of all ranks, and of the Supreme Command and General Staff, in waging modern warfare.

It should be borne in mind that the offensive during the winter 1941-42 campaign was mounted in face of general nazi superiority in strength and weapons. Our strategic reserves were slender. It would have taken very economical and rational use of every division, every regiment even, to achieve a complete success. Yet due to our inexperience we wasted a lot of our strength.

Bourgeois historians, particularly those of West Germany, focus their attention on Hitler and his preventing the German defeat in the winter of 1941 from developing into a disaster like that which befell Napoleon's army. Edgar von Buttlar declares, for example, that Hitler saved the Wehrmacht from a crushing rout by his "iron" will and goes to the length of quoting the following panegyric upon Hitler by Jodl, the Führer's close associate. "I have never admired Hitler so much as in the winter of 1941-42," Jodl said, "when he alone restored the tottering Eastern front, when his will and determination spread to the most forward position. . . Any other depiction of Hitler's behaviour at the time goes against the historical truth."**

Jodl, and Buttlar himself, extol Hitler for preventing his troops from withdrawing and thereby allegedly saving the "eastern armies" in the winter of 1941-42.

* Deliveries of arms by our Western Allies could have helped a lot at the time. Regrettably, they were very small. From July 1, 1941, to June 30, 1943, United States lend-lease shipments of tanks and aircraft equalled as little as 6 per cent of what the Soviet Union was producing itself.

** *Weltkrieg, 1939-1945*, S. 154.

It will be recalled, however, that Hitler issued identical orders in later exigencies, whose content boiled down to something like the following: "The territory trodden by the foot of a German soldier must not be abandoned under any circumstances." Yet the nazis abandoned all the territory they ever trod on. So it was not a case of Hitler's miraculous "will and determination". It was just that the Red Army did not have sufficient resources to keep the nazis on the run in the winter of 1941.

Summing up the aforesaid, let us make a few final remarks.

To begin with, let us underscore the beneficial effect of the non-aggression pact the Soviet Union signed with nazi Germany in 1939. There is uncertainty here and there on this score. Some people are of the opinion the war would not have caught us unawares if we had not signed the treaty. Some say the treaty with a fascist state cast blame on our socialist country. Those are extremely immature judgements, the result of but a superficial analysis.

In the absence of a treaty with nazi Germany, the Soviet Union would have been politically isolated at a most critical time. It would have had to fight the whole capitalist camp single-handed.

Suppose we had refused to sign the treaty proposed by the nazi government after the Western Powers had, in effect, scuttled negotiations with us concerning the bridling of aggression. The nazi government would have interpreted our refusal as an intention to act against Germany. It would have speeded preparations for the war against the Soviet Union, and would have had extensive aid and support from all the major imperialist states. Japan, which was Germany's ally, would then have attacked us, and we would have had to fight on two fronts against a powerful imperialist coalition.

As it was, developments after the conclusion of the non-aggression treaty with Germany were essentially favourable for us, because the imperialist camp was split and unable to form a united front.

The other thing we ought to stress as a major factor in

the initial stage of the war is the collapse of the nazi blitzkrieg strategy. It is plain that Germany could not have won a long spun war. It could not even have fought it to a draw. It was thus foredoomed. This indicates that our early effort laid the foundation for the subsequent turning of the tide in our favour.

The enemy's offensive strategy suffered its first telling setback in the first six months of the war. The nazis, who had thought it was their god-given privilege to advance, to pursue runaways, were compelled to assume the defensive all along the line after our counter offensive in the winter of 1941-42. We wrested the strategic initiative from the aggressor. Admittedly, the Wehrmacht managed to recapture it in the summer of 1942, but then the nazis were no longer able to mount simultaneous offensives at all points of the front. All they could do was to advance in the southern sector.